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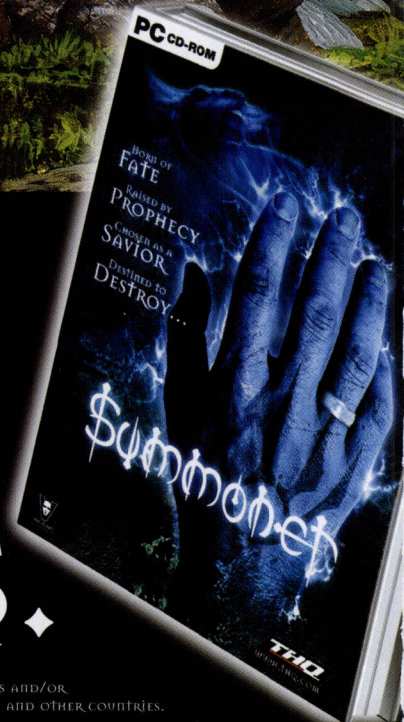


IN A  
WORLD RULED  
BY DESTINY...




AND TORT BY CONFLICT...

SAVIORS  
CAN BE  
DESTROYERS.



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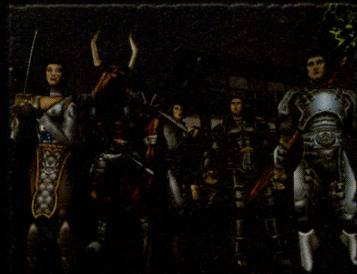
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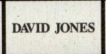
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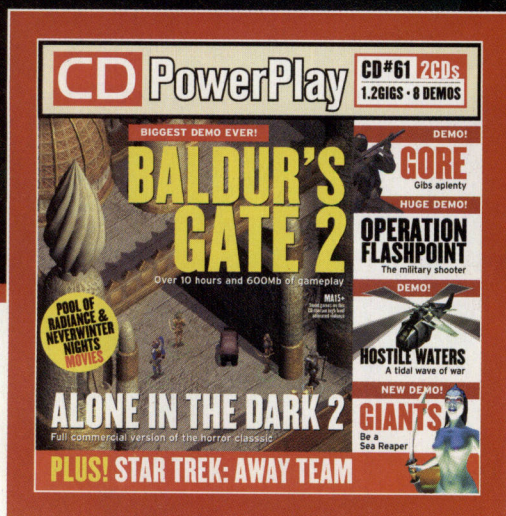
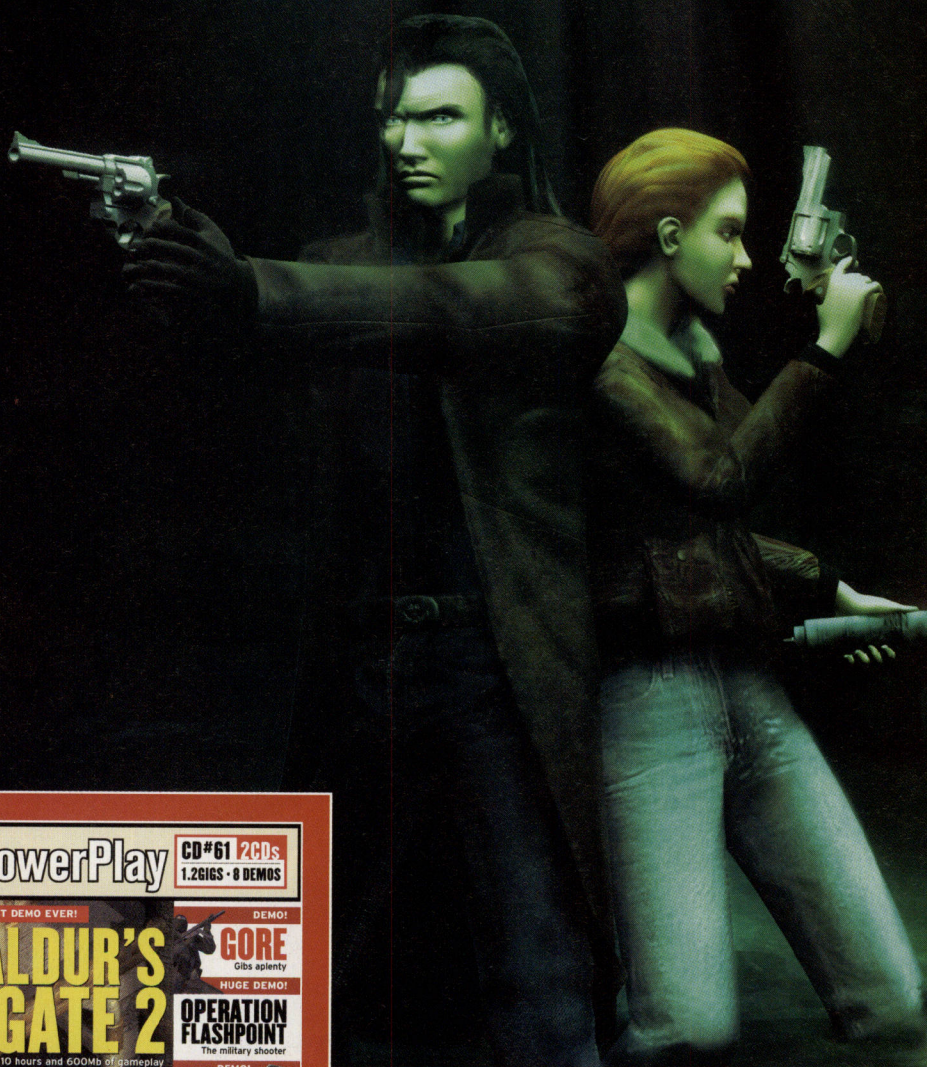




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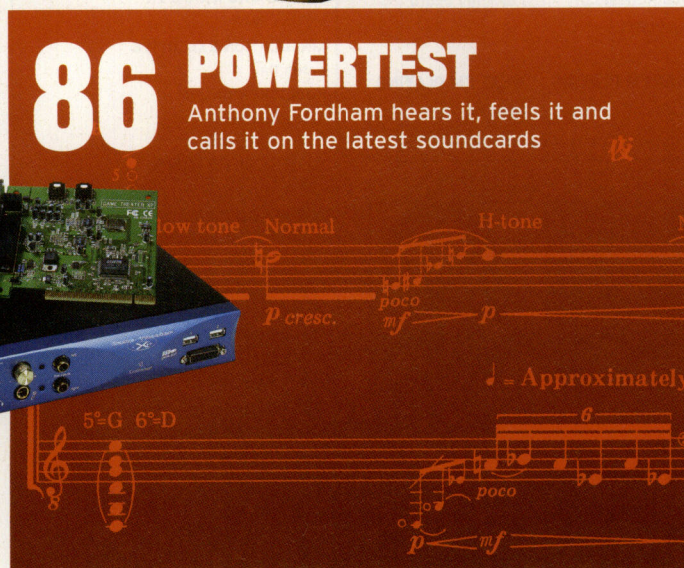
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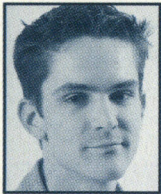
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# CRITICAL MASS



## DAVID WILDGOOSE

Like any normal person, I turn the lights back on **WHAT I'M PLAYING** Black & White

**T**he topic on everyone's lips at Gamestock this year was the relationship between videogames and the massmarket. From Ed Fries' keynote address to discussion panels featuring luminaries of the develop community to drunken journos arguing in the bars late into the night, one question recurred: how can gaming break into the mainstream?

When you consider the worldwide revenue generated by videogames already surpasses that of film, it seems like an odd question to be asking. Yet in terms of credibility, gaming still has some distance to travel. It is still perceived by the wider public as an activity exclusive to kids, that adults should be embarrassed about. To enter the mainstream, games need to be taken seriously.

The solutions proffered by the Gamestock attendees were linked by common threads: games need to be easier, interfaces more accessible, environments more familiar. Each goal has merit: most games are too difficult, control mechanisms are overly complex, obscure fantasy worlds still dominate. Yet for me, there remains one factor missing from the debate. That is, the nature of games themselves: interaction.

For those wondering why games are not as widely consumed as film or tv, then the reason

lies in their interactive nature. Games demand participation from the player; a degree of effort is required beyond what is necessary to view a film or watch tv. For newbies, this is a serious obstacle.

When games are more relevant, controls more intuitive, and difficulty curves gently incline, we will only be part of the way there. If games request greater attention than less interactive pursuits, then surely the rewards attributed to the player should be higher. And it's precisely at this point the majority of games are found wanting.

How many times have you completed a task in a game and felt less than satisfied with result? Reward systems in games aren't really about nice cutscenes, new weapons or secret characters.

Warren Spector once said that games are all about the player, not the designer; playing a game should be about creativity, not about second guessing the designer. Reward systems make the player feel clever and give a sense of achievement. When it does this, no other medium can compete.

PC PowerPlay is a magazine that takes games seriously. We think games deserve a place in the common cultural landscape alongside other artforms and media. Come with us and let's pioneer this breakthrough together.

david@next.com.au

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## THE PC POWERPLAY CREW

This month: 'What do you do when you're alone in the dark?'



### ANTHONY FORDHAM

Whimper softly for my lost youth

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Captain Comic 2



### JOHN DEWHURST

Lie legs together and knees down

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Gangsters 2



### DANIEL STAINES

Consider paying the long overdue electricity bill

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Summoner



### HARRY MARAGOS

Get flashbacks of being stuck in a hellhole in 'Nam

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Unreal Tournament



### CHANTAL BAIRLE

Watch repeats of Twin Peaks

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

500



### MARCH STEPNIK

Pluck my beard

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Deus Ex

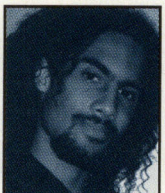


### JAMES COTTEE

Unwholesome things with fruit

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Spacewar



### TIMOTHY C. BEST

Weep for all the baby seals

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Black & White



### CHRISTIAN READ

Listen to the beat of my Hellbound Heart

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Undying



### RYAN HOVINGH

Crank up the sound and blast my way around in...

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

...Fallout Tactics



### GEORGE SOROPOS

Consider getting my other nostril pierced

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Sudden Strike



### ED FOX

Sleep

#### WHAT I'M PLAYING

Black & White



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# Earth and Beyond

WESTWOOD RETURNS TO COMMAND AND CONQUER THE GALAXY

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Westwood

### PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

### AVAILABLE

TBA

### URL

ebweb.westwood.ea.com

HAL vs the Mutant Space Bugs of Death



In space no one can tell where the bathroom is







Planetside  
strategy  
and really  
big ships



**T**he announcement of Westwood's previously super secret foray into the realm of persistent state online gaming, *Earth & Beyond*, was met by the gaming with public with a variety of emotion. Some exuded utter jubilation while others expressed nonchalant indifference. These guys said they were shocked that no one found out about Westwood's four year development of the title, those guys claimed they 'knew it all along'.

But us? What emotion did we express? Well, quite honestly, it was nothing short of plain and simple *fear*. *Earth and Beyond*? They're not basing a game on that horrible, horrible television show are they? The one

that made me throw the cat at the television? Happily, no. Westwood's long developed online opus has nothing at all to do with its dire namesake. Those who have seen that show will know this is a good thing in terms of the plot. While we don't have the space to explore the game's intricate story here, here's a five word summary: future, corporation, alien, galaxy, war.

#### Beyond Everquest

But like you care about the plot. Whether or not Zoltar 999 has declared war on X'Daxna P is a matter of complete indifference to most gamers just as long as we get to *do stuff* - and believe you me, Westwood has given us plenty of 'stuff' to do in *Earth & Beyond*.

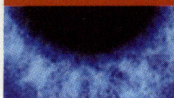
Firstly, and most obviously, is fact that, hey, it's an entire freakin' GALAXY out there. This ain't no persistent state country, or persistent state planet - it's a persistent state GALAXY to explore, exploit and conquer with literally thousands of other players worldwide.

With the Westwood legacy, one would expect that the game is going to be all about getting a ship and then COMMANDING it to go and CONQUER other ships. Not so. Revolving around three races representing three distinct skills - war, exploration and trading - *Earth & Beyond* will allow players the freedom to carve their destiny in the online galaxy any way they choose. Be it by the gun, compass or cargo-crate, one's own fate is entirely in one's own hands.

The purpose of this first look is not an in depth preview into what to expect - that will come later. What we hope to do is whet your appetite, appeal to your desire and, basically, get you all wound up about games we think you should be excited about. *Earth and Beyond* is one of those games - just you try and tell us that you don't agree.

Daniel Staines

### WHY EARTH AND BEYOND DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...



■ It's being made by Westwood, for one

■ It looks great, for two

■ Gives us the opportunity to carve our own destinies

■ And, for four: GALAXY. Just in case you missed it first off



# Zoo Tycoon

A SIMULATION WITHOUT ROLLERCOASTERS - WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT!

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Blue Fang Games

### PUBLISHER

Microsoft Corp.

### AVAILABLE

September

### URL

bluefanggames.com



An tragic event at the giraffe topiary saw five children maimed







**I**n the entertainment business, they say, "Never work with animals or children", which sounds like solid advice. But, seeing as that cuts out most games journalists I know and most of the Redfern office, it's difficult to establish if this is the case outside daytime television. Hold your breath no longer, **Zoo Tycoon is the concrete management gaming exception that proves the rule.**

We've seen management games featuring hospitals, cities, theme parks - you name it. The focus on controlling a zoo setting is

intriguing - with a number of communities to keep happy, the game promises to become a little complex at times. Sure customers might not like the price of the hamburgers but think about a rampaging grizzly bear for a second. Sound like fun? Of course it does... especially if I could somehow make the bears eat the bad customers... Hmm...

#### Animal crackers...

Zoo Tycoon is the new flavour of management sim ice cream. This challenge is to balance the well-being of animals with the well-being of customers with the well-being of your pocket. Build the enclosures, tranquillise and relocate the animals, stock the drinks counters - and the kids will come. The more money you make, the more animals you can own and exhibit. Clean up the kids' yack and the animals' poop and the rest is corporate history.

Ease of use will be Zoo Tycoon's focus, from the intuitive interface and tutorials to the open-ended freeplay mode. From the looks of it, the game will be an aesthete's

dream - pretty and functional. Whether a seasoned strategist or newbie, Zoo Tycoon will make sure all comers can begin entrepreneurial duties quick smart.

#### ...In my soup

Challenging scenarios and secret items should give this sim a lifespan that some of these games seem to lack. A nice comfortable interface and easy-to-access information on customers and inhabitants will help provide the long-term appeal. Add to this the inclusion of over 40 animals and 60 habitat construction materials and I can smell the interest growing.

Most exciting is the general concept and attractive interface appearance, which seems to be aiming for the broadest range of gamers, from the younger to the very mature would-be zookeeper. Reminiscent of classics like The Sims and Rollercoaster Tycoon, Zoo Tycoon could be the next big thing for all PC control freaks the world over, looking for something to dominate.

**John Dewhurst**

### WHY ZOO KEEPER DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

■ Intuitive interface means near effortless management

■ Kids and animals - definite potential there

■ It'll give us a break from blasted rollercoasters

■ There's bound to be a monkey or two!



# TORN

WHAT CAN CHANGE THE NATURE OF AN RPG?

## DETAILS

**DEVELOPER**  
Black Isle Studios

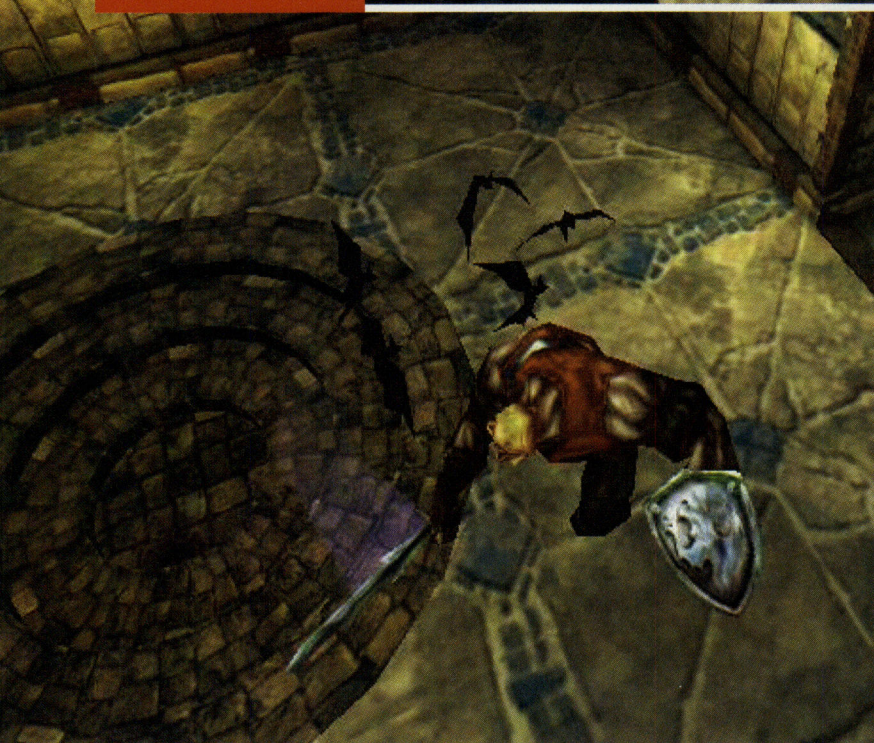
**PUBLISHER**  
Interplay

**AVAILABLE**  
4th Qtr

**URL**  
[torn.blackisle.com](http://torn.blackisle.com)



Fortran the Barbarian didn't bat an eyelid during this fearsome encounter



Those crates look mighty suspicious





It's early days yet, but the Lithtech engine looks fine

**G**iven the studio's track record with *Fallout*, *Baldur's Gate* and *Icewind Dale*, a new announcement from Interplay's roleplaying division, *Black Isle*, should be received with enthusiasm. Doubly so, given that no fewer than four of the PCPP crew are currently walking the infinite paths of life through the same company's genuine masterpiece, *Planescape: Torment*. Needless to say, we're very excited about *TORN*.

The world of *TORN* - yes, it's always spelled in full capitals - is a place of *Black Isle*'s own devising. After Hasbro purchased Wizards of the Coast, Interplay no longer has the rights to create games based on the official D&D rules, aside from extending existing franchises such as the abovementioned titles - and even that can only last until 2005. As such, *Black Isle* must now forge titles according to its own rules and set them in original worlds.

*Fallout*'s open and flexible skill system has provided the inspiration for the *TORN* rules. Since there are no character classes only races, PCs (player characters) are free to learn

almost any skill they choose. The player therefore doesn't feel as if their characters are following predetermined routes when they 'level up'. Essentially, it's a system that allows for more variety within the party than does traditional D&D.

#### Love will tear us apart

In the sense that it's not set in the *Forgotten Realms* or *Planescape*, the *TORN* world is original. However, many familiar elements are present nonetheless; elves, dwarves, mages and orcs all feature prominently. The world derives its name from an ancient mythology that views existence as being divided, fractured or indeed 'torn' and thus precariously balanced. The themes of the game echo this divided nature: order and chaos, free will and determinism, and of course good and evil.

While *TORN* doesn't draw upon the D&D license, *Black Isle* has for the first time licensed technology to develop a game. *TORN* will use the Lithtech engine (which stands at version 3.0 at present) to assemble its 3D world. A



recognisable top-down view remains in place, with the camera operating autonomously from a convenient vantage point. Like Westwood's *Emperor: Battle for Dune*, this should ensure an accessible, playable game blessedly free from the need to constantly tweak the camera controls.

For those four members of the PCPP crew still in the company of Morte, Annah, Vhailor, etc, the most crucial ingredient of *TORN* is the composition of the development team. Which means we're all thrilled to bits (torn, even) that the majority of the *TORN* team worked on *Torment* in some capacity. *TORN* lead designer Dave Maldonado was, among other areas, responsible for the Clerk's Ward in Sigil, arguably the most fascinating location in *Torment*.

We'll bring you more on *TORN* after we have checked it out at E3.

David Wildgoose

#### WHY TORN DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

■ It's a new game from the *Black Isle* masters

■ And from the makers of *Planescape: Torment*

■ Roleplaying free from the restrictions of D&D

■ The world of *TORN* already holds enormous promise



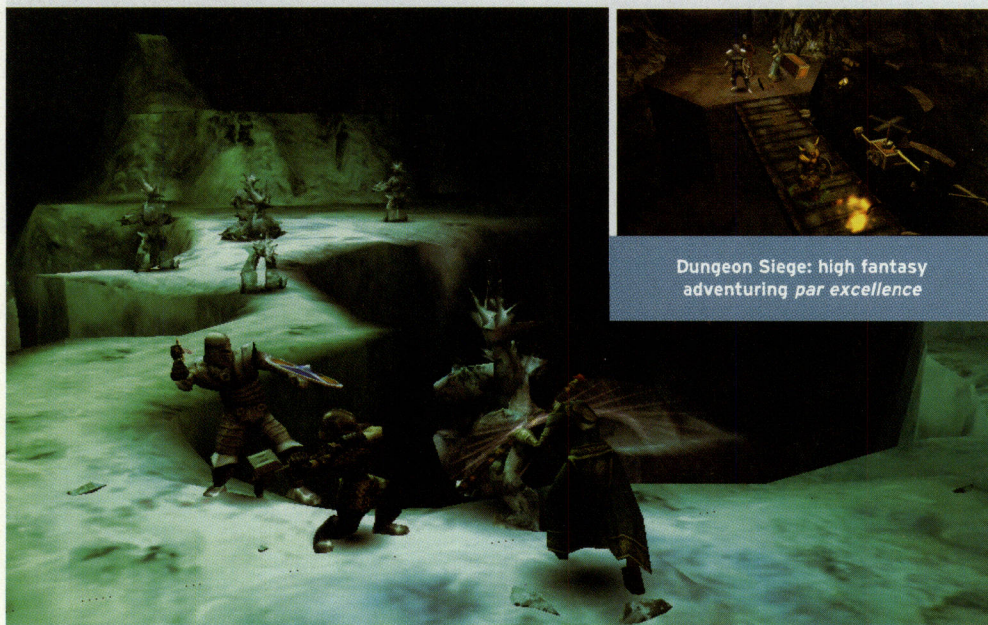
# Spotlight

NEWS FROM ALL QUARTERS OF THE GLOBE



## Gamestock report

MICROSOFT SHOWS OFF SIX NEW PC TITLES  
AND DEBUTS EIGHT XBOX GAMES



Dungeon Siege: high fantasy  
adventuring *par excellence*

On Tuesday March 13, Microsoft hosted its annual Gamestock press event in Seattle, Washington. Nearly two hundred journalists from across the globe gathered at the software - and now hardware - giant's Redmond campus to witness firsthand Microsoft's 2001 line-up of PC and Xbox games. While the latter was clearly the major focus with six titles making their public debut, the ever-reliable PC did not disappoint.

On PC, the six demonstrated titles were a mixture of new announcements and

perennial favourites. Mech Commander 2, Dungeon Siege and Train Simulator have all been in development for a while and each appears close to fulfilling its potential. Of the three new announcements, Sigma was perhaps the most exciting, though it was by far the furthest from completion. A new iteration of the Flight Simulator franchise surprised no one with either its presence at the show or its accomplished design. Finally, Zoo Tycoon (see p10) borrows from a proven formula and applies an original theme with considerable broad appeal.

### Design challenge

Vice-President of Microsoft's Games Division, Ed Fries, delivered the keynote address to commence proceedings. He began by demonstrating the first game he ever coded - a Frogger clone for the Atari 2600 - in an effort to illustrate just how far the industry has come in such a short period of time. Fries' self-deprecating humour - the game was mediocre even back then - won over most in attendance, though the more cynical suggested he was instead lowering the bar so much that anything following was bound to look amazing in comparison. Fortunately, it did.

The central theme of his speech concerned how games might break into the mainstream or the massmarket.

"Our audience can be so much bigger than it is today," Fries said. "I want to talk about why haven't we reached the massmarket yet. I believe that we can. I actually believe that we are on the cusp of breaking out to that much larger audience. In the next five years, I think that we can do it if we do things right."

The solution Fries proscribed did not simply involve implanting an Xbox into every home. Rather he issued a challenge to developers to reassess the way games on any platform are designed. "We've struggled in this business for twenty years to try reach the mass audience. I don't think it's about making games for girls. I don't think it's about sex or violence in games. I don't think online gaming is suddenly changing things for us and will instantly break out to this huge audience. I actually think in a way it's simpler than that.



## GAMESTOCK HIGHLIGHTS TOP THREE PC GAMES



### 01 SIGMA

Hybrid fauna is a military resource that has remained remarkably untapped by game designers. Relic hopes to change all that with Sigma. With over 50 animals to be mutated in conjunction with a solid RTS framework, the concept is sound enough. Add a game engine that draws comparison to Black & White and Relic are on the verge of creating one of the most exciting games this year.



### 02 ZOO TYCOON

Rollercoaster Tycoon with monkeys? Yes, please.

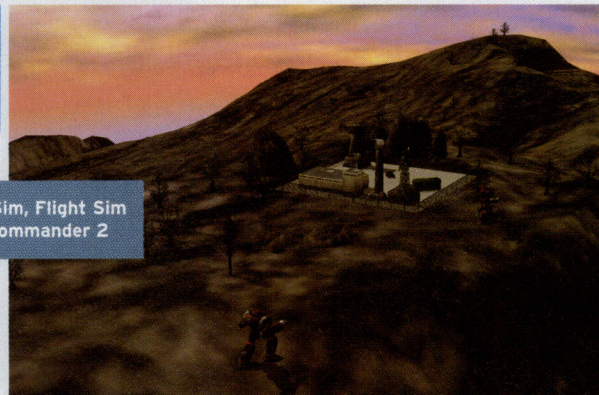


### 03 DUNGEON SIEGE

Adventure in a seamless fantasy world? With orcs and dwarves? We will have one of those, too.



(l to r) Train Sim, Flight Sim and Mech Commander 2



### What the future holds

"Let me try and explain it this way," Fries continued. "A great book, a great movie, a great play - they're about more than killing time. They're about more than just keeping you busy. We need to reach out to our audience. We need to create things that are relevant to them, relevant to their lives and experiences. We need to try and change how they view the world. We need to have something to say to them. If you think about the games that we are building, we ask the wrong questions. We ask, 'What kind of game is this? Is it a realtime strategy game? Is it an RPG?'"

"Instead we should be starting to ask the designers here, the developers here in this room, 'What are you trying to say with this game? What do you want it to mean to people? What do you want it to mean to the people who play it?'"

"I guess one way to say what I'm saying is that we need to make our goal to create not just entertainment, but to create art. I think that is the goal of all the other forms of media, of the people who really take it seriously.

We need to take that seriously too in this business. It's really I think the only way that we are going to advance to where we want to get to. If we take that seriously, if we focus on making art, not just entertainment, then I think maybe for the first time, we will actually deserve to speak to the mass audience. And we can inherit our rightful place as the future of all entertainment."

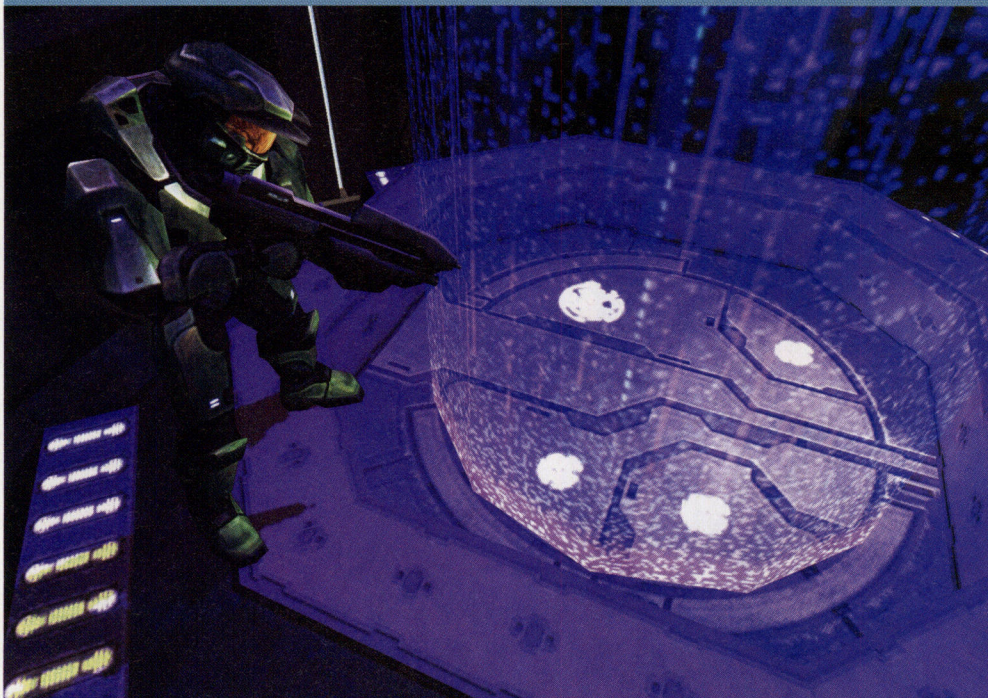
This theme was taken up by those who participated in the discussion panels organised throughout the day. Alex Garden (Relic), Chris Taylor (Gas Powered Games), Jordan Weissman (FASA), and Brian Reynolds (Big Huge Games) led the first panel on the future of PC games. Accessibility was the catchcry, as nearly all in attendance agreed that PC games tend to be impenetrable (in design and control) to all but the hardcore players. Better tutorials and learning curves, as well as streamlined interfaces and realistic settings were adopted as the way forward. However, one French journalist illustrated the down side when he suggested that if this route is taken then games such as Planescape: Torment probably would not be made.

Next, Garden and Weissman were joined by Tim Schafer (whose new company, Double Fine Productions, recently joined the growing list of Xbox developers) and Lorne Lanning (Oddworld) to debate taking games into the massmarket. Garden's assertion that Myst was probably the best game of all time because it appealed to the broadest range of people was certainly the most contentious point raised. While Lanning impressed with his desire to meet the challenge set by Fries and inject meaning and worthwhile social commentary into the games he creates. The socialist leaning of the Oddworld series is the prime example of this. ◉



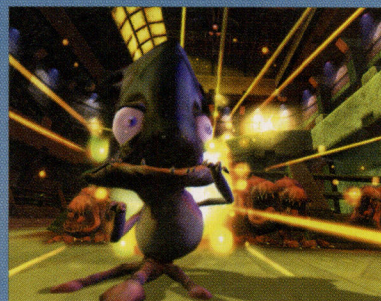


## GAMESTOCK HIGHLIGHTS TOP THREE XBOX GAMES



## 01 HALO

To put an end to all the debate: right now the PC simply could not do justice to Bungie's vision for Halo. The stable Xbox platform has allowed Bungie to create an astonishing world on a scale we've never seen before. And until a PIII-733 with a Geforce3 becomes the baseline PC, we'll have to make do with a scaled down version. The message is clear: if you want Halo, buy an Xbox.



## 02 MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

The cleverest (and smelliest) platformer in development.



## 03 AMPED

The Tony Hawk of snowboarding games. Perform tricks in front of the assembled media to become a snowboarding superstar.



(left) Azurik  
(right) Fuzion Frenzy



Interspersed between an occasionally controversial keynote speech and the various provocative discussion panels, there was plenty of time to do what everyone was really there for: play the games. On Xbox, Halo was the undoubted highlight, and still remains the most compelling reason to be interested in the console. If Bungie can deliver on its promise, the four player cooperative mode will be incredible - even if it is splitscreen. The controls are responsive as well, despite the doubts aired by numerous PC veterans of the mouse and keyboard.

Of the new announcements, freestyle snowboarding sim Amped felt the most playable, while Fuzion Frenzy promised a thoroughly entertaining, albeit lightweight, multiplayer experience.

Project Gotham was little more than a souped-up version of the excellent Metropolis Street Racer (Dreamcast), but developer Bizarre Creations had only a couple of weeks to prepare the demo.

Action adventures Azurik and Nightcaster seemed traditional console fare - pretty but derivative. Homeworld creator, Relic Entertainment, showed off Sigma: The Adventures of Rex Chance to an enthusiastic reception. It's essentially a realtime strategy game where units are built by crossbreeding animals. For example, combine a rhinoceros with a gorilla and you get a tough defensive unit with a brutal melee attack. We'll bring you more on Sigma in the not-too-distant future.

Dungeon Siege revisits territory conquered by Blizzard with Diablo, bringing it up to date thanks to a gorgeous 3D world and a more in-depth roleplaying experience. Anyone who enjoyed Baldur's Gate 2 - or indeed Diablo 2 - should check out our feature on Dungeon Siege next month. Likewise, we'll bring more news on Mech Commander 2 next issue, as well as updates on Train Sim and Flight Sim 2002 in the near future. And you'll find our First Look at Zoo Tycoon on p.10.

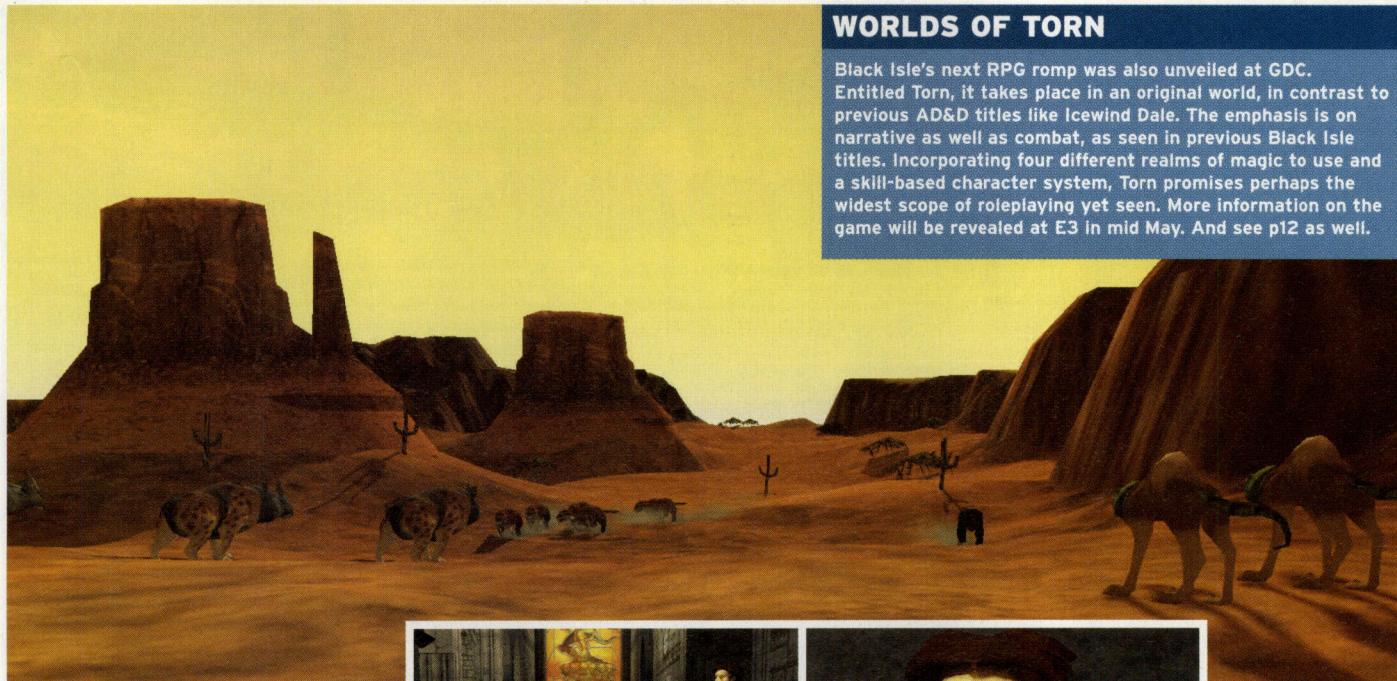
Microsoft has assembled an extremely talented collection of development studios over the last couple of years. To compare last year's Gamestock to this year, it's clear this huge investment is beginning to pay for itself. It's also evident that despite the emergence of Xbox, titles like Sigma and Dungeon Siege indicate the PC is far from being neglected. Hopefully next year will be even better.





# Game Developer Conference

TECHNOLOGY IS THE FOCUS AT THIS YEAR'S GAMES GATHERING



## WORLDS OF TORN

Black Isle's next RPG romp was also unveiled at GDC. Entitled *Torn*, it takes place in an original world, in contrast to previous AD&D titles like *Icewind Dale*. The emphasis is on narrative as well as combat, as seen in previous Black Isle titles. Incorporating four different realms of magic to use and a skill-based character system, *Torn* promises perhaps the widest scope of roleplaying yet seen. More information on the game will be revealed at E3 in mid May. And see p12 as well.

Once again the industry elite gathered for the annual Game Developer Conference in San Jose, California, staged on March 20 - 24. Each year, the GDC offers a glimpse of the newest technologies and gaming titles across all platforms. Presentations by developers and discussions of current trends and issues make the GDC an industry event first, a games show second.

Last year's GDC is remembered as the X-Box show, but this year saw some interesting new developments from many of the industry's elements and not only from game developers.

Alex Garden from Relic Entertainment presented his newest title, *Sigma*, a realtime strategy game where units are created by combining different species to produce unique and powerful animals. Design concepts and their implementation were discussed at some length, such as *Sigma*'s high-end resolution, which will scale down to accommodate the system on which it is running. This will apparently increase shelf-life. Game features such as sound, artwork, graphical detail and animal animation were presented with the words "level of realism" mentioned repeatedly.

The new version of the LithTech 3D engine was demonstrated with sequences from *Aliens vs Predator 2*, the firstperson shooter sequel still in development. The game featured the obligatory tight interiors but also expansive outdoor sequences which were rendered rapidly and in great detail by LithTech 3D. Fully moving wildlife and fauna demonstrated an engine capable of heavily populated game environments.



Mark Rein showed off the new Unreal technology. But you knew about that already

## Tech developments

Epic Games demonstrated the Unreal 2 technology engine complete with improved large scale terrain, skeletal and facial animations and high polygon character models. This would come as little surprise though, considering our exclusive look at Unreal's improvements in PCPP#59.

Gamespy Industries announced a global back-end infrastructure for online gaming. Gamespy.net, a system of software, network personnel and servers, will offer publishers and developers online and multiplayer options without the need to maintain them. Basically an extension of the online services Gamespy already offers, developers can now incorporate this technology into their software titles.

Sun Microsystems unveiled an initiative between technology and game developers to create industry standard Java APIs. The aim is obviously to bridge some of the difficulties involved in creating software across many different platforms. Also announced was the Javagaming.org, a community site aimed at encouraging the discussion and advancement of Java technology as a basis for games development. Some of the companies signed up in these Java initiatives

include Sony Online Entertainment, Sega.com, Shiny Thing, Blam! and Plazmic.

Seamus Blackley, technology director of the XBox returned to update last year's report on Microsoft's much anticipated console. Blackley discussed development strategies for Xbox titles, emphasising consultation with and an unbiased approach to developers. He went on to point out the accessibility of the XBox for programmers and to also detail its very impressive capabilities but with some technical demos and production information. It seems the big game exclusives are being saved for the Tokyo Game Expo and E3.





## DUKE E3

3D realms will bring Duke Nuke Forever to E3. No demo but a lengthy video featuring actual in-game action is planned, rather than scripted events. Once the press run of DNF begins soon after E3, new screenshots and a trailer will be released. Following our optimistic review in PCPP#59, readers should watch out for the sky falling down.

## SOURCES

Mod programmers can now set upon Serious Sam, with Croteam's release of SDK sources v1.00a for the Doomesque 3D action shooter. The 3.7MB download contains "the header files and libs to link with the engine and game, complete sources of Entities.dll and Game.dll, debug version of game/tools useful for debugging your mods easier, and autogenerated headers for your model files".

## Origin RIP

ULTIMA ONLINE 2 HALTED AND EA LAY OFFS



The dream is now over for UO2



Origin Systems and Electronic Arts have officially stopped the production of **Ultima Worlds Online: ORIGIN**. The long-awaited 3D MMORPG sequel will not be completed. The official website states: "Rather than create **ORIGIN** as a parallel world competing with **Ultima Online**, many resources that would have been required to complete **ORIGIN** will instead be refocused into **Ultima Online**,

making sure that we can expand and support it for some time to come."

The move looks to consolidate the ground EA has already covered with **Ultima Online**, which has around 230,000 subscribers. Conservation of resources is a paramount concern, considering EA's announcement to lay-off of "under 200" employees. These laid off were from the online divisions and related studios.

The move into new territory for **Ultima Online** begins with the release of **Ultima Online: Third Dawn**, reviewed on p75 of this issue. This is the first step in the ongoing development that will see "new lands, new creatures, and a world that is continually evolving within **Ultima Online**."

## Trek Take Two

ARMADA SEQUEL FINALLY ANNOUNCED!



Activision has announced the return of realtime strategy action in the **Star Trek** universe with **Armada II**. Development is underway at Mad Doc studios, which is made up by members of the original **Armada** production team as well as former Looking Glass employees. The **Next Generation** universe is the setting, with the action taking place over 27 missions. These missions are split into three separate campaigns, each offering control of a separate race: the Federation, Klingons and the Borg.

The emphasis is on three dimensions in **Armada**. Mad Doc promise to offer space strategy combat in a true 3D universe with considerably larger levels than its predecessor. The Tactical View option allows the action to take place in true 3D. The game will also include three dimensional formations.

Multiplayer will boast up to eight players over LAN or internet. The player can not only use any of the races from the singleplayer game but also take control of many of the classic enemies in **Star Trek**, including Cardassians, Romulans and Species 8472. The game should see release at the end of this year.

## Textures?

HITCH HIKER'S GUIDE RETURNS

A thirdperson 3D action version of Douglas Adams' classic sci-fi novel, **Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy**, has been announced by Pan Interactive. A follow-up of sorts to Adams' first meier-ised game, **Starship Titanic** from 1998. The Digital Village from the UK, who developed **Starship Titanic**, will work in a joint venture with Pan Interactive for the production.

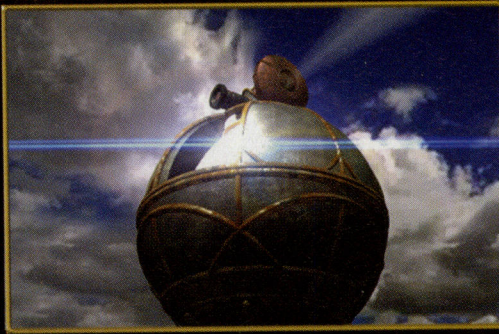
The game follows the adventures of Arthur Dent as his home is destroyed on the day that the Earth is destroyed. Luckily, his best friend, Ford Prefect, is an alien who helps Arthur get off Earth before it is destroyed by the Vogons for a hyperspace bypass.

Quite surprising is that **Hitch Hikers**, a witty, wordy, comic novel will be an action title in the mould of **Tomb Raider**, **Mario 64** and **Zelda**. We can't wait for this one...



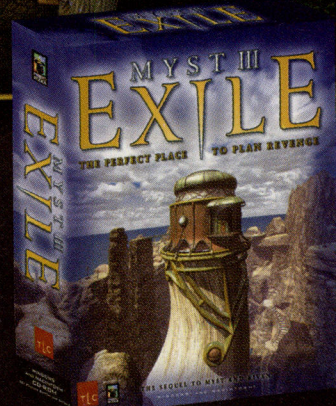
# MYST III EXILE

*The Story of Myst Continues*



The Sequel to Myst and Riven  
Coming May 2001

[www.myst3.com](http://www.myst3.com)



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# Mod Life

SPoonman's ROUNDUP OF ALL THE LATEST MOD NEWS

## WEAPONS OF FURY

For Q3A

Developer Existence

URL [www.planetquake.com/wof](http://www.planetquake.com/wof)

Release beta 2



This is a wonderful mod. You start with the railgun and infinite ammo. Once you kill someone it switches to the rocket launcher, then the Lightning Gun, etc. This pattern continues until you get to the BFG, when if you kill someone you get 100 frags. An excellent concept, if only for the fact you get infinite slugs for your trusty railgun.

## HOLY WARS

For Half-Life

Developer A bunch of Snarks

URL [www.planethalflife.com/snarkwars](http://www.planethalflife.com/snarkwars)

Release Beta 2



Holy wars is a "hunted" style mod, where one player is the saint and all of the other players, or sinners try and kill them to get the Halo (read "flag"). Holy Wars spices things up a bit with quite a few new weapons including the triple shotgun, the jackhammer and a souped up rocket launcher. Another interesting idea is that if you kill too many of your team mates when you're a sinner you become a heretic, somebody who can't even control most of the weapons and is a target for everyone.

## VORTEX

For Quake 2

Developer Project Vortex

URL [www.planetquake.com/vortex](http://www.planetquake.com/vortex)

Release v.107



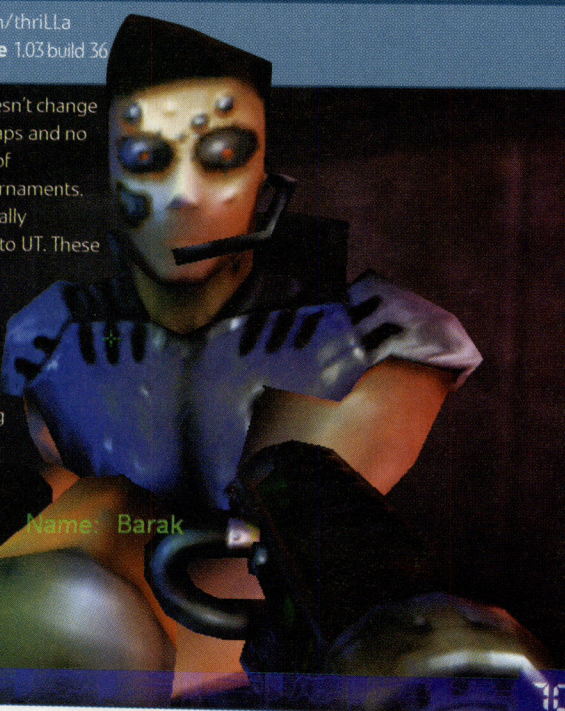
Vortex is a server only Mod, so there's nothing to install on the client side. This doesn't make it shabby though, the concept of Vortex is that when you frag people you get experience points, as your experience goes up your weapons get stronger and you can purchase new abilities. Vortex is a shining example of a server side only mod and it makes it well worth while dusting off your "old school" rocket launcher and joining in the fray.

## TEAMPLAY/TOURNEY MOD

For Unreal Tournament Developer pakman/thriLLa

URL [tm.polosatiy.com/news\\_eng.html](http://tm.polosatiy.com/news_eng.html) Release 1.03 build 36

The first thing to realise about this mod is it doesn't change the gameplay of UT. No new guns, no new maps and no new enemies. However, it offers a great deal of functionality to those who want to run UT tournaments. TTM includes many enhanced features especially designed to ease the switch of play from Q3A to UT. These features include a timer and improved player identification. The scoreboard is improved with death scores and detailed info about teammates such as health and time. Another cool feature is when you hit someone you actually hear a noise. This is very useful at long distances. If you want to run a UT tourney this is definitely the place to look. Along with that, TTM has a bucket load of statistics you can pick through afterwards.



# SPOONMAN'S LAN DIARY

## VALHALLA

Location Adelaide SA

Dates Monthly

Players 250

Price \$15

URL [www.lanparty.com/valhalla](http://www.lanparty.com/valhalla)

This LAN is held at the Uni SA Magill campus about 20 minutes east of Adelaide. They average 250 players per event, but have potential for up to 300 players. The Valhalla LANS are usually known for their great prizes and hilarious competitions (dodgy dance comps, dry weetbix eating, karaoke and barrels of other fun stuff). All games are played, with counter-strike and age of empires 2 being the most popular (for a change). Valhalla is also a Leechers heaven with FTP's galore!

## CONCUSSION

Location Sydney NSW

Dates 12/5/01

Players 120

Price \$20

URL [concussion.ausgamers.com/](http://concussion.ausgamers.com/)

ConcussionN is held at Roselea Community Centre in Carlingford in May. It promises a big fat network as well as all the regular LAN goodies that we have all come to expect from almost every party. If you're wondering what goes on at a general party then this is probably a good way to find out. ConcussionN promises to be a vanilla LAN Party, but that's all that's really required isn't it?

## BONG

Location Sydney NSW

Dates 19/5/01

Players 180

Price \$15

URL [www.bong.com.au](http://www.bong.com.au)

The admin of bong simply state in their info "Can you handle a real LAN Party?" I guess we should all go along and see. BONG is held at St. Mary's Memorial hall, funnily enough, in St Mary's. They make lots of references to being hardcore, which may or may not be a good thing, although I'd be sure to dust off the old KoRn T-shirt before entering. Maybe I'm just a little too anxious to fit in, but BONG does sound like a great LAN, give it a spin.

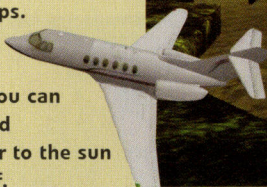
For submissions, email [spoonman@next.com.au](mailto:spoonman@next.com.au)



# Win!

## ENGAGE FLIGHT SIM PACK!

Before flight simulations, people could only live out their flight fantasies via films, balsa wood model planes and flying planes themselves perhaps. But with the advent of everything sim, you can blast this, that and everything or soar to the sun like Icarus himself.



To celebrate the glory of flight sims, Acclaim is giving away 3 copies of the E.N.G.A.G.E air-borne game pack, which includes Flying Corps Gold, Apache Havoc, Fly! and F/A-18 Korea. To win one of these delightful packs, simply send us your favourite flight experience, from a game, film, a real flight, childhood anecdote -whatever. Send your miraculous voyage to: **Come Fly With Me!** @ PC PowerPlay, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016.

## Winners!

**MICROSOFT #57**  
Liam Hughes, Tas

N George, Tas  
J Bishop, Vic  
Garry Watts, WA

Sam Webb, Qld  
Zac Glover, SA  
Karen Dethomas, Vic

**CALL TO POWER II**  
B Yeomans, NSW  
T Smith, NSW  
J Robards, Vic

**BLUE BYTE**  
E Waterford, NSW

**SHEEP!**  
Beanus, Geelong Vic

**KATY COMP 2**  
G Robinson, Qld

**EVERCRACK**  
Alex Henry, ACT  
Teena Staber, NSW  
Richard Allen, Vic

**RUNNERS UP**  
Robert Romans, NSW  
Rael Young, Tas

**RUNNERS UP**  
Lara Jane, Vic

**MICROSOFT #58**  
Ryan Brown, NT

# dr claw

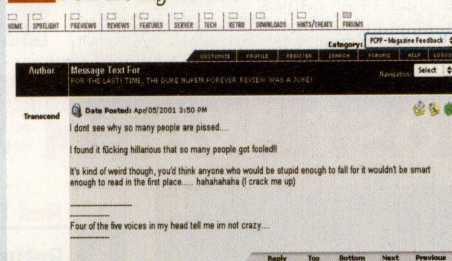
## HE SIMPLY CANNOT BE STOPPED

hello to all my fans of my column and my continued success in this magazine. i know you are all champions of my I33+ness and you love me because i am so excellent.

this month on the website which is at [www.pcpowerplay.com.au](http://www.pcpowerplay.com.au) they started the official flame thread which is now going strong with more than 200 replies which is pretty amazing if you ask me. also there was a webchat which i wanted to go on but mum said i had to take my cat to the vet because of the pus. but the webchat was heaps cool anyway because i have exclusive access to the transcript because i am so I33+ but you already know that.

anyway the other big thing that happened this month was that you all complained about the duke nukem forever review which was in PCPP#59 and i agree with you it was low and it was lame and i

PCPowerPlay.com.au



had a big fight with a man at EB because i told him DNF must be out because pcpp said it was out but it was not out and i was made to look like a fool and not I33+ at all so i made my cat attack the man but he hit my cat which is why my cat now has pus and has to go to the vet.

so keep being I33+ like me and i will see you next month and remember to go to [www.pcpowerplay.com.au](http://www.pcpowerplay.com.au) or austnet on IRC at #PCPP because i might be there and i might talk to you if you are cool.

# DVDA

## WITH JAMES COTTEE

### LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

This is the fully restored and re-mastered version of the 1962 classic, one of the most influential and renowned movies ever made. It's also one of the longest, at over three hours and 40 minutes. Spanning two discs, this deluxe collector's edition includes stacks of extras, including over an hour of docos, trailers, interviews and promo reels from the films launch. Still engrossing after all these years, think of it as Dune, but without the worms or the drugs. Or Sting.



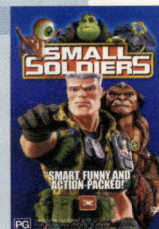
### AMERICAN PSYCHO

This isn't as good as the book, but that's hardly a surprise, is it? To reach it's full potential this film would need about three extra hours of torture and bloody dismemberment, including the bit where Bateman attached the electrodes to her... well, yes. At any rate, the eighties yuppie sex scenes are absolutely awesome, and the mounting sense of insanity is faithfully translated. Little in the way of extras on the disc, but such a self-explanatory feature hardly needs them.



### SMALL SOLDIERS

Think of it as Gremlins 3. A surprisingly entertaining microcosm of the global war being fought between the military industrial complex and hippies. I.e. a bunch of walking, talking action figures destroy suburbia. Featuring entertaining yet brief performances from Denis Leary, Phil Hartman and the guy who plays the hologram on Voyager, plus Tommy Lee Jones as the voice of Major Chip Hazard. Humorous, irreverent, and rather post-modern, the film's only weakness is its laboured exposition.



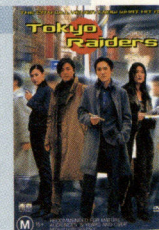
### HOLLOW MAN

An uncalled for load of reconstituted tripe at the cinema, this is actually quite fun on DVD. The commentary track of Paul Verhoven, Kevin Bacon and the hack who wrote Hollow Man allows us the viewers to find out exactly what the hell it was they were thinking when they made this immensely disappointing movie. Deleted scenes on the disc include the rape sequence in greater detail! Certainly not a disc to buy, but your morbid curiosity may warrant a rental.

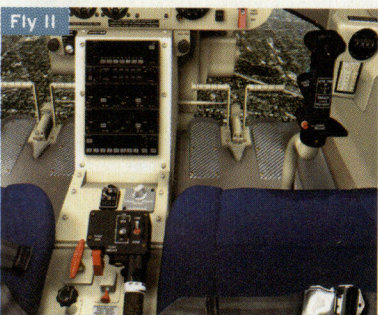
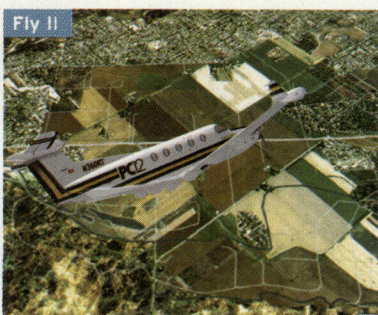
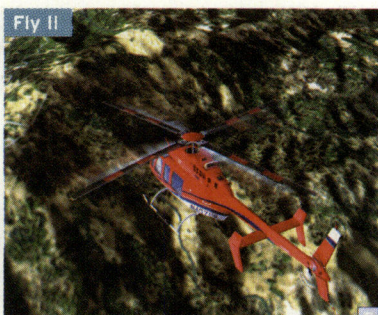


### TOKYO RAIDERS

Ever wondered what happened to the Hong Kong film industry after the communists took over? Well, after their best and brightest fled to Hollywood to make terrible movies, those who stayed behind kept right on making terrible movies. Like Tokyo Raiders! Somewhere in between the unengaging fight scenes and the soppy womanism is some kind of CIA plot to de-stabilise the Yen, but you have to be awake to pick up on that. About on a par with The Replacement Killers.







# Coming soon

## MAY 2001

**Arcanum** Jack of all Games  
**Commandos 2** Ozisoft  
**Desperados** Ozisoft  
**Dragon Riders** Ubisoft  
**Evil Dead** THQ  
**Leadfoot** Jack of all Games  
**MechCommander 2** Microsoft  
**Myst 3 Exile** Ozisoft  
**Operation Flashpoint** Ozisoft  
**Startopia** Ozisoft  
**Tropico** Jack of all Games

## JUNE 2001

**Anachronox** Ozisoft  
**Baldur's Gate 2 Throne of Bhaal** Interplay  
**Conflict Zone** Ubisoft  
**Dungeon Siege** Microsoft  
**Emperor Battle for Dune** Electronic Arts  
**Evil Twin** Ubisoft  
**Fly II** Jack of all Games  
**Gangsters 2** Ozisoft  
**I-War 2 Edge of Chaos** Ozisoft  
**Legends of Might & Magic** Jack of all Games  
**Merchant Prince 2** Jack of all Games  
**Pool of Radiance** Ozisoft  
**Red Faction** THQ

## JULY 2001

**Alone in the Dark** Ozisoft  
**Diablo II Lord of Destruction** Jack of all Games  
**Mafia** Jack of all Games  
**Max Payne** Jack of all Games  
**Motor City Online** Electronic Arts  
**Neverwinter Nights** Interplay  
**Rune Halls of Valhalla** Jack of all Games

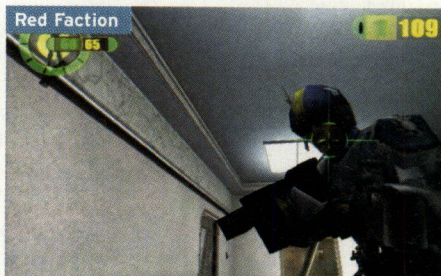
## AUGUST 2001

**Duke Nukem Forever** Jack of all Games  
**Empire Earth** Jack of all Games  
**Super Bombad Racing** Electronic Arts  
**Throne of Darkness** Jack of all Games



# Australia's most wanted

Changes aplenty in the Top 10 this month. Emperor: Battle for Dune has apparently slipped in the Australasian population's interest - I-War 2 has nudged Westwood's impressive sci-fi RTS out of our list. Red Faction is a red letter affair evidently, being one of the talking points of the moment. Again it has taken the coveted top spot, this month tightly contested by Tribes 2 and Return to Castle Whup-ass. Note well the considerable movement, nay jostling, among the mainstays. Halo has jumped five positions, proof that this Bungie stunner is inspiring interest amongst the Powerplay faithful as well as games media. Anticipation for the new pack of D&D titles continues to simmer, if not boil over, with both of the RPG titles holding their positions at no. 4 and 9.



Our previews of these and other RPG titles should help to sate those desires in this month's feature. This month's lucky winner is **G. Rosauro** of **Newcastle, NSW**. A copy of Fallout: Tactics is yours! Send your Top Five most wanted games to: [wanted@pcpowerplay.com.au](mailto:wanted@pcpowerplay.com.au).

1	Red Faction	◀
2	Return to Castle Wolfenstein	◀
3	Tribes 2	◀
4	Neverwinter Nights	◀
5	Halo	◀
6	Warcraft 3	◀
7	Doom 3	◀
8	Commandos 2	◀
9	Pool of Radiance	◀
10	I-War 2	◀



# Hall of fame

DO YOU OWN THESE MODERN MASTERPIECES?  
PCPP GOLD IS YOUR GUARANTEE!



## Black & White

Electronic Arts

Much hyped God & his pet sim offers great power with a good dash of personality. Anthony trounced Black & White and it still got gold - now that's pedigree.

● Score 92 ● Issue #60



## NASCAR Racing 4

Jack of All Games

American style racing with all the stops out, this is NASCAR with an unprecedented level of detail. The new industry standard.

● Score 93 ● Issue #60



## Sudden Strike

QV Software

RTS with three nations, not three races. Sudden Strike has big missions, big forces and a big interface to make up a thrilling wartime escapade.

● Score 92 ● Issue #60



## F1 Racing Championship

Ubisoft

Picking up the slack some recent contenders have left. Fast, smooth and detailed in all the right places, F1 Racing gets the chequered flag.

● Score 90 ● Issue #60



## Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2

Activision

Much more than a console conversion or mere skateboarding sim, Tony Hawk 2's fluid gameplay mechanics are a breath of fresh air on the PC.

● Score 92 ● Issue #58

# Our most wanted



**DAVID** Evil Twin  
Edgier than American McGee



**ANTHONY** I-War 2  
Mamma jamma!



**JOHN** Neverwinter Nights  
I've just bought a sack of dice



**DANIEL** Startopia  
Because I'm a two-headed alien

# Games Chart

THE BEST SELLERS THIS MONTH

**inform**

The Official Australian  
PC Games Chart

Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA

W/E February 18, 2001

## Top 20 Best Selling Full Price PC Games

(>\$29.95 inc. GST)

Position	Game Title	Game Type
1	↔ The Sims	Strategy
2	↔ The Sims Livin' Large	Add On
3	↔ Sim City 3000 Unlimited	Strategy
4	↑ Cmmnd & Cnqr Red Alert 2	Strategy
5	↑ Age of Empires Collector's Ed	Strategy
6	↑ Sim Mania For Kids	Strategy
7	↑ Age of Emp. 2: Conqueror's Exp	Add On
8	↑ Diablo 2	RPG
9	↓ Sim Mania Pack	Strategy
10	↔ Age of Empires 2	Strategy
11	↑ Links LS 2001	Sports
12	↑ Delta Force 2	Adventure
13	↓ Ashgan	Adventure
14	⊛ Elite Sports Pack	Sports
15	↓ Combat Flight Sim 2.0	Simulator
16	↑ Shogun: Total War	Strategy
17	⊛ Sabrina Teen Witch Spellbound	Family
18	⊛ Cmmnd & Cnqr Tiberian Sun	Strategy
19	↓ Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2	Sports
20	⊛ Golf 2001	Sports

A V S D A  
Australian Visual Software Distributors Association Ltd

⊛ - New entry  
↔ - Non mover  
↑ - Up from last month  
↓ - Down from last month

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**PC PowerPlay**

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**HP8**





# INBOX

## PLATINUM PC

The **LETTER OF THE MONTH** writer wins a game from Ozisoft's Platinum range of titles. Available in Platinum this month are Deathtrap Dungeon, Tomb Raider, Outcast, Imperium Galactica 2, TA: Kingdoms, Wheel of Time, and Le Mans 24 Hours.

## Letters Topic: What new game at E3 has you most excited?

Write to: PC PowerPlay Letters, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016 Email: letters@pcpowerplay.com.au



### SUCKS FOR GAMES

The couple of months after Christmas always sucks for games, I understand that. But why did you have to fill up the space with bloody motherboards? Sure I have one and I use it all the time, but do we really need to read about two dozen of them? I pity your tech writer who had to wade through them, one after another. I pity me even more for trying to read it.

If I wanted to read a hardware mag, I would buy one. The tech section is useful and I use it but PLEASE try not to give so generously next time.

**PhalAnX**

Your point is noted...

### RIDICULOUS BECAUSE

I thought the videocard PowerTest was awesome. It really shows PC PowerPlay as a real source for hardware news and stuff. The hotware reviews were good too, especially the A7M266 motherboard. But I am still having trouble finding

### BYTE SIZE

I've noticed on the spine of the last two mags some educational pics. The first is from Giants showing some nipple. The second (*From Black & White - Ed*) is of some physical educational. What's going on?

**Shane Hipwell**

**It's our duty to society...**

one! This is ridiculous because this motherboard has been around now for a couple of months, and it is on many people's catalogues, but I can't seem to find one in stock! Also in the videocard PowerTest, was it really necessary to give a long description of each card? They are all pretty much the same, aren't they? Otherwise, keep up the great work!

**Fox3, via email**

**...but your point is noted with greater emphasis.**

### OR DRUNKEN YOUTH

Time and time again we have seen games released prematurely. In their bug-infested state they stumble around occasionally running into an ignorant parent or drunken youth, but rarely make it in the gaming market and therefore defeat the purpose of releasing them early in the first place.

Now just recently two games in particular have proven a strong argument for the old line "it's better to be safe than sorry". Black & White, which has been delayed numerous times, is set to become one of the most innovative and original games of all time. The Black & White fan base is gigantic already and it has just been released. As well as Duke Nukem Forever, which has just been crowned a last minute greatest game of all time by the illustrious PCPP staff despite fears of an infection of the Daikatana syndrome (*Er, well... - Ed*).

Sure not all games have the backing and experience of Black & White and Duke Nukem Forever. Not

all games have the innovation or quality to be given the time of day, but if publishers can't recognise when they have a game with potential then they don't deserve to make any money.

**Christian Kavanagh**

### I STAYED LIVING

Congratulations on PCPP#59. I really believe that it is far and away the best computer gaming magazine I have ever read (five or six times so far) and this has nothing to do with the fact that you dobbed me in for letter of the month in the last issue.

### BYTE SIZE

A quick question: I was wondering what program you guys use to capture your in-game screenshots?

**Michael Brinkley**

**A quick answer: Hypersnap.**

I rarely ever read past issues of mags, but I think that I will have to keep this as a reference, even if it is only for the results of the motherboard tests alone.

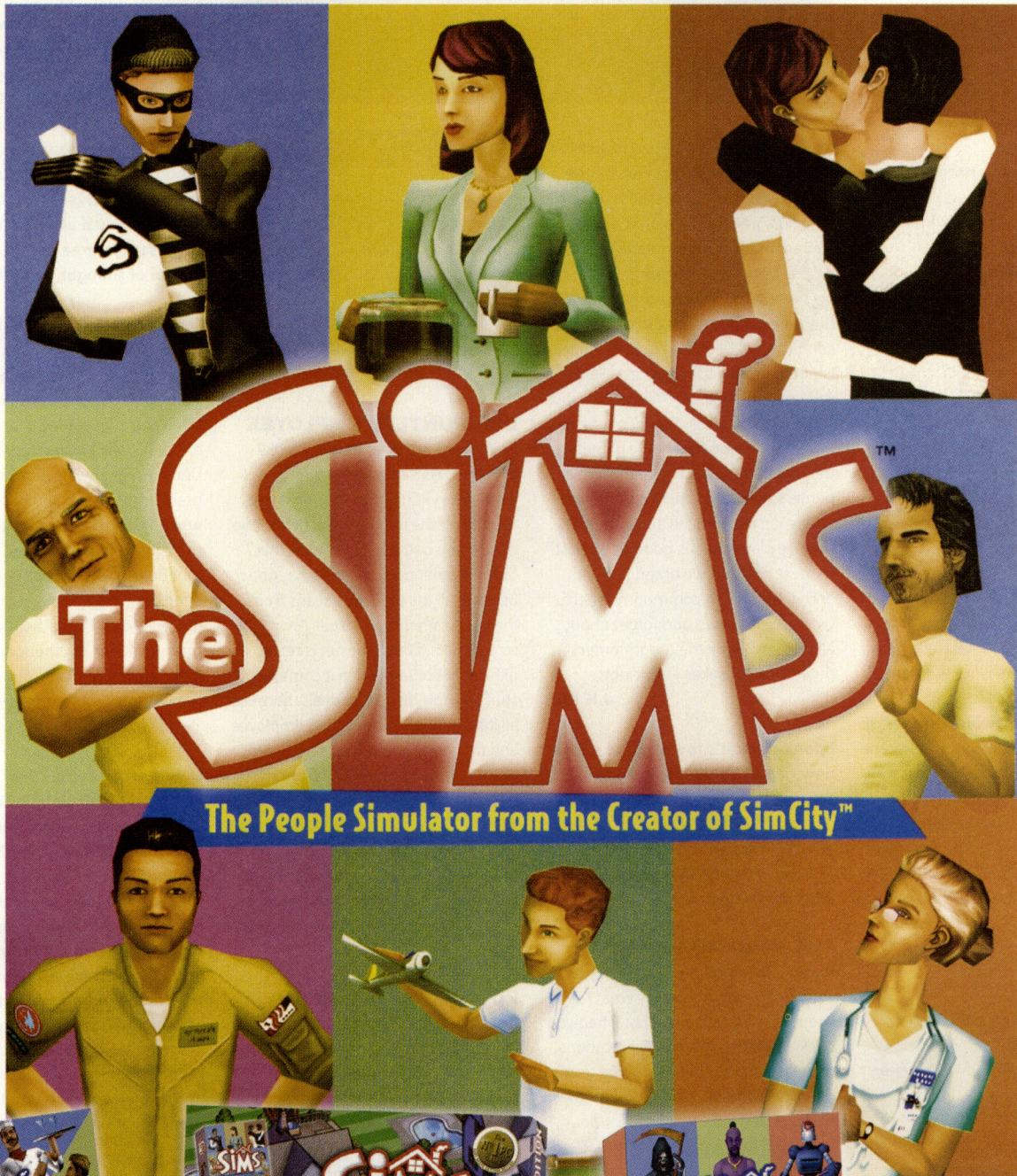
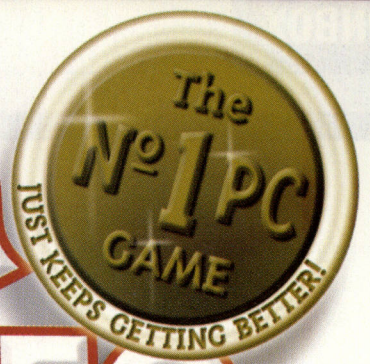
So much seems to be going on in the gaming world now. We seem to be on the verge of a new era. You are all terribly excited about Black & White (which certainly seems to be a unique type of game), but I am excited that Morrowind is not far away. I hope that I have finished at least the first three acts of Diablo II by then. Daggerfall was a marvellous game. I stayed living in that world for quite a while after winning it. I had my own house, a horse and cart, and a boat, so why not?

The promise all those years ago was that you would be able to import your characters into the new world, but I doubt that you will be able to do that very much. I doubt that I could even find the character now anyway.

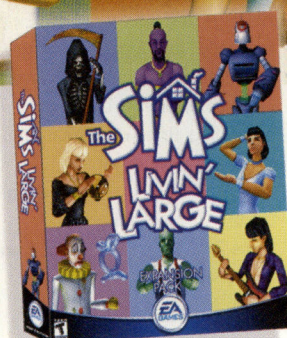
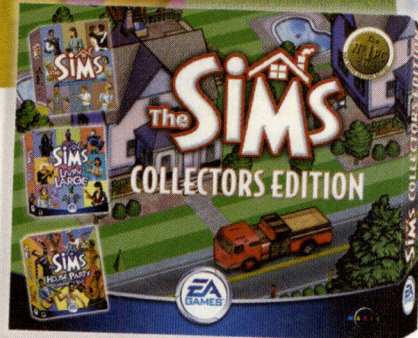
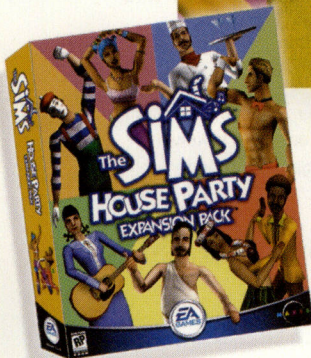
Your new format is very clear so that it is easy to go to one section only if that is what you wish.



# CREATE a BETTER LIFE



The People Simulator from the Creator of Sim City™



ELECTRONIC ARTS AND ALL ASSOCIATED LOGOS ARE TRADEMARKS OR REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF ELECTRONIC ARTS IN THE U.S AND/OR OTHER COUNTRIES.  
INFORM DATA - AUSTRALIA. THE SIMS IS THE NUMBER ONE SELLING PC GAME BASED ON TOTAL UNITS SOLD IN THE CALENDAR YEAR 2000.



I loved Duke Nukem, but was never able to get that far in it. How are you going to score from now on when Duke Nukem Forever has been given 99%? I hope that you can keep on improving, but how can you beat the best?

Roy Collins

Stay tuned for an in-depth report into Morrowind in an upcoming issue.

### SCRIMPING ON WRITING

Is it just me or do all of your articles seem to be getting longer? I don't think I have ever read a preview anywhere as long as Black & White (PCPP #59). Are you scrimping on writing on more things by making everything one page longer? I bet you are.

Harry Norman

I'll have to keep this reply brief...

### SAY, FIFTY SAVES

Firstly, I must say I believe that Black & White will be one of the best games ever. I say "one of" because I think no one game can ever be credited as the best ever. My reasons are, without sounding cliched, that I believe it will revolutionise the freedom and creativity we as gamers have within any given gaming world. Also because it sounds like it will be almost infinitely replayable and because the gameplay itself will be incredibly fun.

Having said that what I really want to address is last month's Letter of the Month. I can see why you published it, but I must take exception to it. I don't believe saving is essential in every game type.

Project IGI was playable from the last level you beat so in a way it did save, but only between levels. Whether this was due to the game being rushed out by developers or not, it was still a good, challenging game. He said he made over a thousand saves in Deus Ex and thought he was clever because they only allowed for one thousand. Wrong! What would

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### BEST THING EVER

I can't believe all the hype about games right now. Every game that's going to change the planet while it's in development comes out and sucks so bad. I think of Giants, which was meant to be the best thing ever but was only good (I like it so don't get me wrong). I heard rumours that Black & White isn't the greatest game either.

What's up? Why do we get so excited about some pissy movie at E3 or somewhere, then expect a game to be the greatest because some guy like Molyneux says it is. I think everyone should just wait for the game to be released, then make up their minds.

Jim

have been clever is if he had beaten the game in fifty saves. That would have been clever; over a thousand is pathetic! I do agree that Hitman is a very limited game, but it is not meant to be a Deus Ex or System Shock 2.

If we start comparing every game to the best game of the moment we will soon run out of games to play. Now it is not too much to expect excellent games, but to expect brilliant, ground-breaking, and revolutionary ones every time is unreasonable. Some games are genuinely crap, but I hope that we as gamers don't turn into a community where it's me, me, me and if a game that we play is not as good as the last game we played we brand it as old and unoriginal. A community where we become selfish and forget about all the hard work the programmers put in. For our sakes I hope not!

J.H. Rice

**I don't think it's too much to expect new games to be original and, in some way, ground-breaking. After all, why should anyone pay \$80 for another version of a game they already own and can replay for no additional expense?**

### THE MIND BOGGLES

Unreal 2 looks plain awesome! I was completely blown away by what I saw. I never really liked Unreal but when you think about the possible ramifications of the technology in other game terms, the mind boggles. I thank God for the heritage that delivered Deus Ex, so naturally I look forward with great expectation to what other developers can make from the stunning beginning. Bring on Unreal 2 (and what will inevitably follow!)

Greg Lucas

**Deus Ex 2 with the Unreal 2 engine? Yes, please.**

### BYTE SIZE

Is Anthony Fordham related to that sports commentator? I can't remember his name.

Easter Bend

**Yes, Anthony is actually Bruce McAvaney's lovechild!**

### DISGRUNTLED EMPLOYEE

How awesome does Unreal 2 look? But you guys said it was a world exclusive in PCPP, even though it was already on the net the week before the issue came out. What's up with that? Did PC Gamer do something naughty? Because all the pics were scans from the mag, rather than actual screenshots. I think the net is really difficult to contain when it comes to stuff like non-disclosure deals, because all it takes is one disgruntled employee and then everything is ruined. Except of course, we get to see stuff sooner! But I bet you were upset.

Uriel, via email

**Indeed, someone, somewhere was very naughty... Draw your own conclusions from this.**

### POINT ABOUT BOOKSHELF

On the issue of PC games being shoved into those pesky DVD boxes, although I prefer the big clunky boxes, I can see your point about bookshelf space, convenience, etc. The most distressing thing, however, is that the manuals are going to get smaller and smaller than they already are and we are going to get less of those fancy extras - keyboard charts, shiny pictures and the like. I know I was very impressed by the presentation of Baldur's Gate II - large manual and cloth map. These sorts of

things help you start the game on an even more positive note, and are, of course, valuable to refer to. So, game developers (and publishers), please, please do not skimp on the manual and extras, they add to the game and show that you have the consumers interest in mind.

Joshua Blackman

**But the DVD-style cases look so cool... Erm, anyway. Chunky manuals have been on the way out for some years now. How many games in large boxes have you bought recently that slipped a skimpy manual into the CD jewel case? It's not the new cases that are to blame. Regardless, there's a school of thought that suggests well-designed games shouldn't need a manual anyway. We don't necessarily agree with it, but it's a school of thought, nonetheless.**

### DEVELOPERS ARE BOGGED

Is it just me or are there hardly any exciting games to look forward to? Apart from Black and White I can't think of a single thing that gets me excited. I was looking forward to Undying for a while, but without any great enthusiasm, and of course when I bought the game it turned out to be just another shooter. It seems that developers are bogged down in either making endless sequels (because the original sold well) or making clones of other games (because the original sold well). Why is everyone so afraid to innovate?

Tom

**Ooh, you're a cynic. When developers don't innovate, we get Doom 3; when they do, we get Vangers. Which would you prefer to play? Seriously, there's always been innovation in game development, just as there's always been a blatant lack of innovation. But if you're expecting every aspect of a new game to be amazingly original, then inevitably you'll be disappointed. If you can accept the reality of marginal improvement and evolution, then you'll find plenty to your satisfaction.**

### BYTE SIZE

You guys are yet to review the excellent game Sudden Strike.

Matt

Turn to p23.

### BYTE SIZE

Am I the only one who's found (by using a stopwatch on 3 trials per O/S) that using a Windows Emulator in Linux is up to %250 faster for loading games like UT and Q3 than Windows 98 or ME are? I know many games aren't supported by Linux, but the Windows Emulator is more than sufficient for this I've found.

Avi Bernshaw

**Yes, Avi, I suspect you're the only one...**



# We've Redefined the Art of.... Real-Time Strategy!

With just 2 titles, CDV have set the RTS genre on its ear!

## Sudden Strike

The blockbuster Sudden Strike is set in World War II and offers carefully planned Russian, German, French, American and British missions. The fantastic depth of the game, the infinite tactical possibilities and the excellent gameplay outshine anything ever seen to date. Conquer the enemy's positions, land your troops on his shores, win the cleanup operations and call in paratroops or fighter bombers for support. Whatever you can think of, you will find - in Sudden Strike!

### FEATURES

- Up to 1.000 units per scenario
- Bridges, houses, fortifications, trees and all other objects are destructible
- Realistic gun simulations complete with "real" explosions
- Giant maps, lasting scenic structures
- Erection of fortifications and pontoon bridges
- Realistic reproductions of all orig. units
- Russian, German, French, American and British missions
- Summer and winter scenarios
- Units gain experience and make it from one mission to the next
- Multi player mode: up to 12 players and 4 teams
- Special effects: smoke, fog, explosions, buildings' burning, explosion rebounds, real-time water rendering, etc.

"Sudden Strike is one of THE best RTS games I have ever had the privilege to play... Thoroughly addictive and terrific fun to play, I can't recommend Sudden Strike highly enough. Overall: 94%"  
(PC Home 12/00)

"...an extremely detailed environment... unbelievable game realism... many Single- and Multiplayer missions which you can play over local network or internet. Score: 92%"  
(www.jeuxmag.com)

"No RTS-game before got more realism...the gamefun is long continuously. In the class of RTS-games there is right now no competition for 'Sudden Strike'. Gamefun: 87%"  
(www.gamesweb.com)

"A refreshing break from Sci-Fi RTS, good wholesome WWII action. Top Stuff! Score: 92% Gold Award  
(PC Powerplay May 2001)

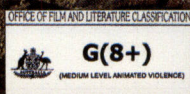


## Cossacks - European Wars

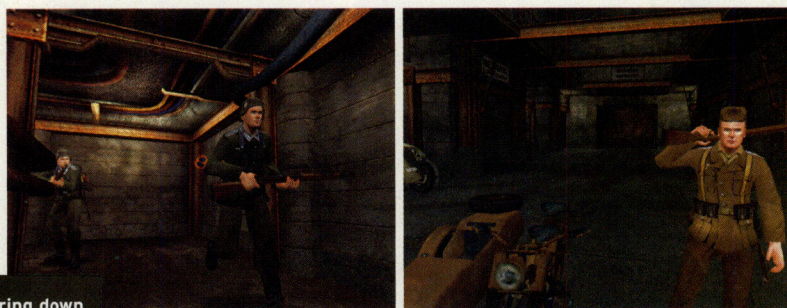
European Wars: Cossacks is a historical real-time strategy based on events during the XVI-XVIII centuries in Europe when nations and states were created and demolished, gold was turned into numerous armies, and never ending wars shed oceans of blood. It was the time when new regulations were developed in armies, and commanders' mastery was polished to perfection. The new era began... with thundering cannons and whistling bullets!

### FEATURES

- Grandiose battles of up to 8000 units
- 16 rivaling nations with their original graphics, economic and technical development peculiarities
- More than 85 real historical large-scale wars and battles of XVI-XVIII centuries
- A huge technological hierarchy of more than 300 upgrades
- Military formations: column, rank, or square. A formation includes an officer and a drummer, and units' abilities increase in a formation
- Unlimited variety of tactical and strategic methods of land or sea war against enemies
- Original economic system with six resources: food, wood, stone, gold, coal and iron
- Full 3D landscape with real world physics
- Resolution: 800x600, 1024x768, 1280x1024, 1600x1024
- Huge maps up to 36x36 game screens at 1280x1024 resolution
- Special effects: smoke, fog, explosions, buildings' burning, explosion rebounds, real-time water rendering, etc.







Staring down the barrel

# Medal of Honor Allied Assault

TANK AT 3 O'CLOCK



## DETAILS

**DEVELOPER**  
2015 inc

**PUBLISHER**  
Electronic Arts

**AVAILABLE**  
October

**URL**  
www.2015.com

As if a game built on the Quake III engine that revolves around killing Nazis needed any further endorsement. Medal of Honor: Allied Assault is shaping up to be the most impressive World War II title to date and, ironically, may even knock the much publicised Return To Castle Wolfenstein off the Hitler killing throne before it even gets there. That's ironic, by the way, because Wolfenstein was originally made by id... who also made the Quake III Arena engine. But you knew that already, right?

# Train Simulator

WE GOT A PRESS RELEASE THAT ENTHUSED AT LENGTH ABOUT THE JOYS OF SHUNTING

## DETAILS

**DEVELOPER**  
Microsoft

**PUBLISHER**  
Microsoft

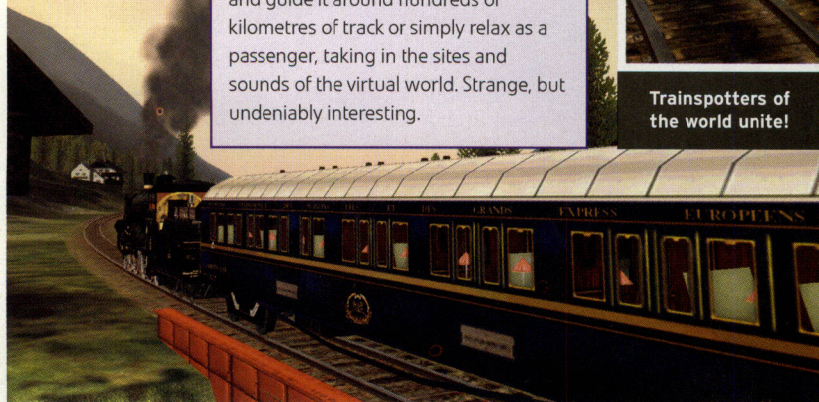
**AVAILABLE**  
July

**URL**  
www.microsoft.com

We can't even imagine the train of events (Ha! Geddit?) that might have lead up to someone at Microsoft enthusiastically nodding as someone detailed the idea for a train simulator. But - what the hey - it still looks fantastic. MS Train Sim is best described as being a super snazzy interactive train set, allowing players to either take control of one these imposing metal behemoths and guide it around hundreds of kilometres of track or simply relax as a passenger, taking in the sites and sounds of the virtual world. Strange, but undeniably interesting.



Trainspotters of the world unite!





# Empire Earth

EPIC? YES, WE BELIEVE THAT'S THE TERM

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Stainless Steel Studios

### PUBLISHER

Sierra

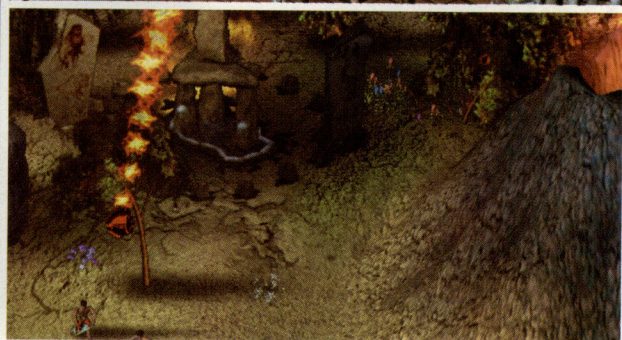
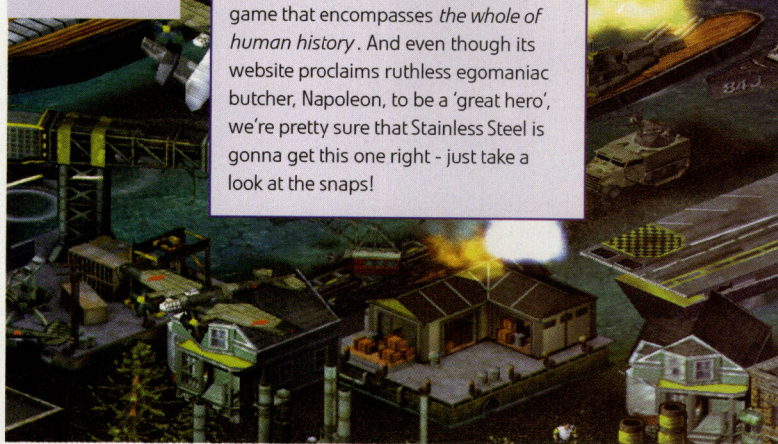
### AVAILABLE

August

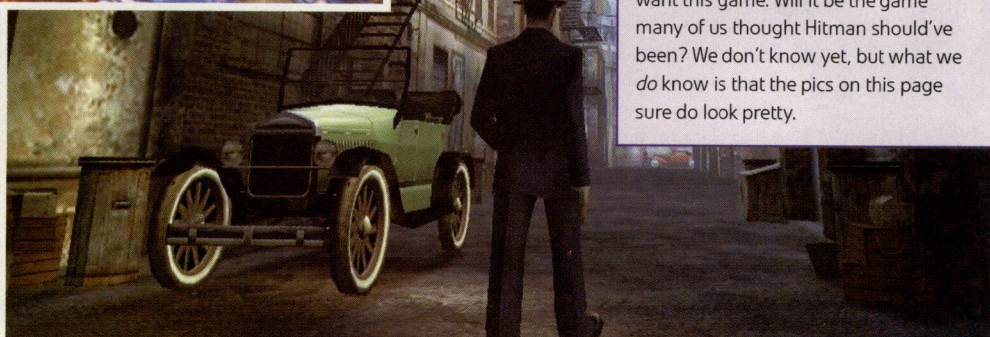
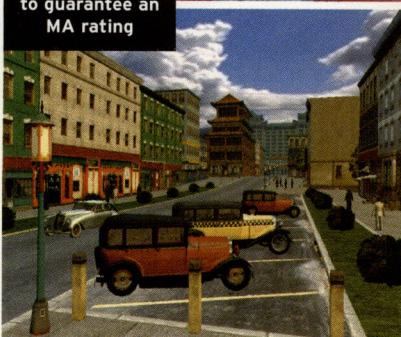
### URL

[www.stainlesssteelstudios.com](http://www.stainlesssteelstudios.com)

Developed by former Ensemble dude and Age of Empires designer, Rick Goodman, Stainless Steel's Empire Earth has been in development for nigh on 28 months and the results are starting to show. Goodman has said on numerous occasions that he wants to make a strategy game that doesn't just encompass epochs like Age did, but rather, he wants to make a strategy game that encompasses *the whole of human history*. And even though its website proclaims ruthless egomaniac butcher, Napoleon, to be a 'great hero', we're pretty sure that Stainless Steel is gonna get this one right - just take a look at the snaps!



There's one way to guarantee an MA rating



# Mafia

ILLUSION WILL BE WEARING CONCRETE SHOES IF THIS DOESN'T END UP GREAT

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Illusion Softworks

### PUBLISHER

Take 2

### AVAILABLE

July

### URL

[www.mafia-game.com](http://www.mafia-game.com)

In a move that's sure to capitalise on the ever-growing popularity of 'crime-sims' amongst PC gamers, Illusion Softworks is pushing heavily to have its upcoming action/adventure title, Mafia: La Cosa Nostra, completed as soon as possible. Frankly, we couldn't be happier. With a change of engine and the introduction of enhanced adventure elements being added since we last excitedly spied it, it's a bit of a moot point to mention how much you should want this game. Will it be the game many of us thought Hitman should've been? We don't know yet, but what we *do* know is that the pics on this page sure do look pretty.



# Dragonriders Chronicles of Pern

## DETAILS

**DEVELOPER**  
Ubisoft

**PUBLISHER**  
Ubisoft

**AVAILABLE**  
June

**URL**  
www.ubisoft.com

THE ONLY STAFF MEMBER TO RECALL THE ORIGINAL PERN ON THE C64,  
DANIEL STAINES CHRONICLES THE DRAGON'S RETURN...

**G**aming in the 1980s was an interesting and entirely different phenomenon to what it is today. This might be difficult to conceive in an era where CGI is striving ever closer to that elusive goal of lifelike perfection, but in the 80s half of the fun came from debating over exactly what a game was supposed to be. Statements

like 'Oh! That's a dog? I thought it was cake!' were not at all uncommon. The best games were those that, like a good book, were 50% imagination, 50% immersive fantasy world.

The little known C64 classic, *Dragonriders of Pern*, was one of these venerable titles. Based in Anne McCaffrey's created land of Pern, *Dragonriders* was a predominately text-based affair of political and military intrigue where imagination was tantamount if one was to glean maximum enjoyment from the game's drab presentation.

But that was the 80s, this is now. Where videocards a thousand times as powerful as a thousand C64s are standard equipment. Where, like it or not, gamers don't need imagination any more. It is here that a re-incarnation of a cult classic is introduced...

### Dragon's lair

Being developed in-house by Ubisoft, *Dragon Riders: Chronicles of Pern* is definitely a title where you can leave your imagination at the door... or gate... or dragon lair or whatever it is that means 'door' in Pern world. Ditching a good deal of the political Machiavellianism from the original game, Ubisoft is developing a richly textured, fully 3D roleplaying adventure title that reeks of class. In fact, upon loading up the press demo we received and viewing the dassy surrounds, the term 'majestic' immediately entered our collective heads.

Ubisoft is developing a richly textured, fully 3D roleplaying adventure title that reeks of class

Pern, it's people, and especially its dragons, exude a regal majesty that perfectly captures the royal atmosphere of the universe we imagined two decades ago.

From tumbling little fire lizard hatchlings to D'Kor, Pern's porn moustachioed protagonist, the attention to graphical detail is at all times evident. An excellent instance of this almost maniacal attention to the particular comes in the form of a simple conversation to be had with an irate chef who, while conversing

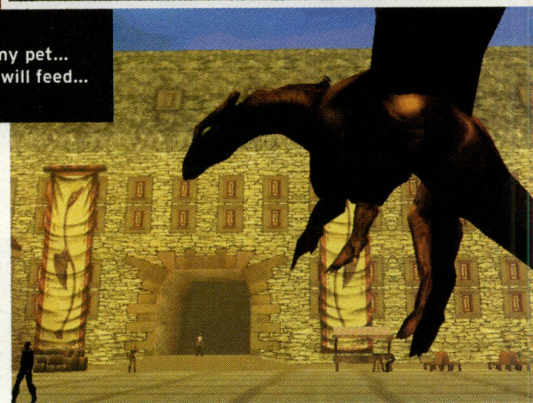
with a gesticulating D'kor, will actually move his eyes to follow the dragonrider's flailing hands. It is simple things like this that serve to complement the intuitive, unobtrusive interface and involving, socially charged narrative. Hopefully it will make for true gaming pleasure and many a nostalgic memory.

### Resurrection

It has been almost twenty years since the original Pern was released on the Commodore 64. Ubisoft attempts at reincarnation are, so far, highly impressive. Although we need no longer imagine the world of Pern or its august, soaring lizards any more than we need imagine a monitor upon a desk, the legacy of this cult classic still lives on strongly in the endeavours of Ubisoft and in the minds of those that appreciate them.



Easy my pet...  
soon we will feed...



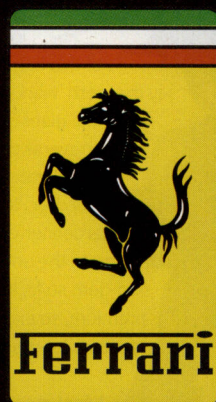


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Tel: (02)4737 9156 - Fax: (02)4733 3595  
[sales@oxygen.net.au](mailto:sales@oxygen.net.au)



# Evil Twin

## Cyprien's Chronicles



### DETAILS

**DEVELOPER**  
In Utero

**PUBLISHER**  
Ubisoft

**AVAILABLE**  
May

**URL**  
[www.4xtechnologies.com/eviltwin.htm](http://www.4xtechnologies.com/eviltwin.htm)

**MAD FRENCH BOY WIELDS WEAPON IN CLASSROOM. JOHN DEWHURST FEELS THE RAGE OF DISTRAUGHT SCHOOL STUDENTS EVERYWHERE...**

**E**vil Twin is the soft-soled adventures of Cyprien, a young ne'er-do-well fallen into a nasty dream. His nightmare world is populated by ghastly and grim creatures - twisted versions of his real life in a dark and wickedly childish fashion. Some deep psychological hurts are lurking in this young man.

Could it be the ennui shuffling inside all French youth? Could it be the slow but inevitable demise of the French language? Regardless, his only course of action is a furious romp with weapons in hand against these apparitions that torment him, in order to save his friends and face his... Evil Twin, perhaps?

Courtesy of French developers In Utero, the concept of Evil Twin was originally intended for a cartoon series. Each episode would explore a common childhood

nightmare - with bed wetting and wooden spoon mayhem. One week, a trip to the dentist - the next, no dessert and straight to bed, young man. Perhaps it's a good thing this became a game instead. Transferring the concept to the PC meant a shift in focus away from specific fears to a specific little guy. And Cyprien is that little guy.

A most intriguing aspect of Evil Twin is the artwork and theming of Cyprien's crazy crackers world. The adventure is set in the land of Bed'under, a strange archipelago floating in limbo., and each island is a grey pastiche of Cyprien's real life.

There is Jocy's Island, set in the pantry, kitchen as well as other gastronomic locales.

Naturally the final boss of this island is the demonic

doppelganger of Jocelyn, one of Cyprien's "big boned", food-loving friends.

Incidentally, the REAL Jocelyn is in the belly of this fiend - did I neglect to say the word 'wacky'? Another episode is set in a giant classroom where you must traverse the desks and escape the evil gaze of the maladjusted teacher. Yet another is a dark garden where giant ants plague you in the undergrowth. In good neo-goth style, lighting is at a premium, so expect the bright colours for dramatic effect.

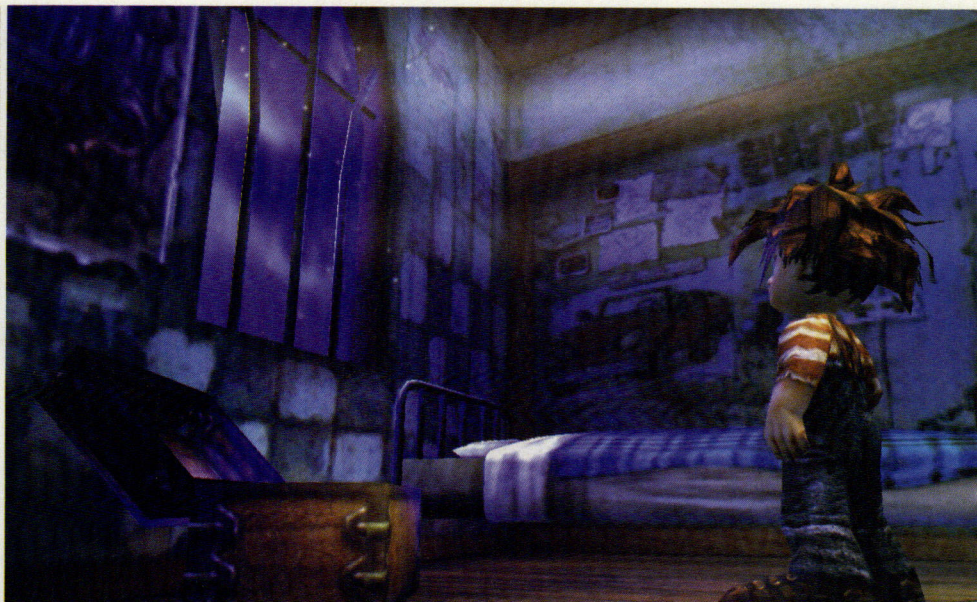
**I feel sooo dark today...**

Like Alice before it, this action/adventure sees the grim slant on gaming



traverse the desks and escape the evil gaze of a maladjusted teacher

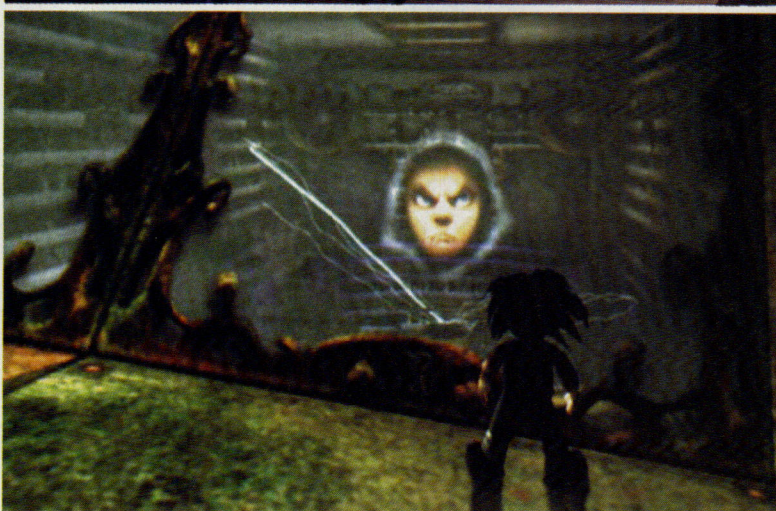




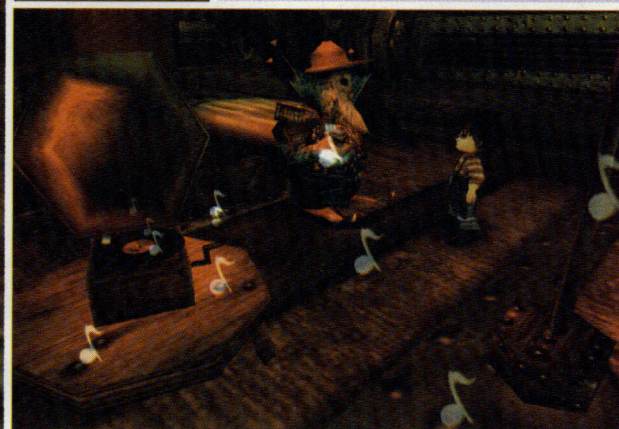
## ADVENTURE? POURQUOI?



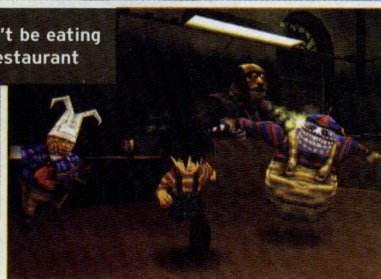
Evil Twin, at a casual glance, is obviously an action game - but where's the adventure element? The game features an in-depth narrative about young Cyprien, his friends and various characters. These in-game cut scenes link the action and probably help with the various puzzles in Evil Twin. This is more of an adventure than it might seem.



No monsters under that bed



We wouldn't be eating at his restaurant



continue unabated. And when I say grim, I really mean it. Preparing a giant vomit-inducing omelette so that one of your friends can be released from the belly of an enemy is just one of the delights in Evil Twin. You might also find yourself cutting open the skull of another like-minded adversary. Dark but comic nonetheless, we promise.

Cyprien gathers an impressive arsenal to augment his meagre slingshot, but he can also transform into Super Cyprien - the high-octane version of himself, obviously. Super Cyprien is near invincible, has a furious array of special weapons and can hover, if not fly. Just the thing for crossing those darned long jumps.

A nice segue to the jumps, hien? Evil Twin will be a third person platform style 3D jumping adventure; comparisons with

Mario 64 are inevitable. With the option of a first person firing mode (with his slingshot no less), Evil Twin is also reminiscent of Zelda 64. These games live and die by their camera controls and while the Beta version we received showed a great deal of promise, let's hope the final version can offer some strong solutions for the roving camera - the pandora's box of action gaming.

### Tres bizarre, non?

The French are notorious for their dramatic and shall we say... unique approach to gaming concepts and Evil Twin is no exception. In the past, there have been some visually immaculate games in great settings at the expense of all else. Far from being JUST impressive to the eye and odd though,

Evil Twin promises some clever puzzles to solve, ingenious enemies and a more mature take on the whole action/adventure thing.

Evil Twin features a good amount of gaming hours. Each of the eight islands contains between five and nine episodes, which makes this a substantial offering for the value minded gamer. The variety of play offered between the hand-to-hand combat and the more platform style physical movement (remember: jumping) means the game should offer enough variety for most tastes. Heavily armed children are the flavour of the month, n'est-ce pas? Vive la violence!

In Utero are keen to make the point that Evil Twin is not for the younger gamer, obviously aiming for that elusive mature and complex audience. There is a decent amount of bad language in Evil Twin, so a young and influential audience is definitely at risk from that... (?) There are some fairly gruesome events involving the bodily functions of island bosses, too. Otherwise, the game is no more than a good-natured high-action romp with a dark tongue in its cheek. We can only hope that In Utero retain the French language with subtitles for a truly distinctive touch, n'est-ce pas? D'accord.





## DETAILS

**DEVELOPER**  
Electronic Arts

**PUBLISHER**  
Electronic Arts

**AVAILABLE**  
July

**URL**  
www.ea.com

# Motor City Online

**ANTHONY FORDHAM DUSTS OFF HIS FLUFFY DICE AND HITS THE ROAD...**

**D**espite not actually holding a licence, your correspondent is regarded as an expert in chucking fully awesome donuts in abandoned parking lots at midnight. Sometimes even in a car.

Remember that scene in that film where that guy drove his car at that edge of that mountain with that other guy and they had to jump out at the last minute and that guy lost his car because he jumped out and the car went off the edge and exploded in technicolour? That's the kind of spirit EA hopes to capture in Motor City Online. Fat cars, wide roads, no laws and taking pride in a really decent paint job.

players will be able to haggle over their Mustangs and Firebirds and accuse each other of selling them a lemon

Some commentators have chosen to label Motor City (part of the hugely successful Need For Speed franchise) as an automatic fuel-injected Everquest, and they're not far off the mark. Taking place in a persistent online city, players will tool around in the hottest of the hot rods looking



for races, spare parts, ace detailing and an awesome deal on that sweet little set of Edelbrock shocks (if Edelbrock doesn't make shocks, please disregard this attempt to appear car savvy). The game will in many ways be an MMORPG, except instead of a character as such, the player will have a car.

Of course, running a car requires cash, and the virtual cash of Motor City is awarded in the form of a weekly salary. This salary will increase as the player levels up, and levels will be awarded based on performance in races, exhibitions, special events and whatever else EA thinks up between now and July.

### Dining out

There will be two principal aspects to the online part of Motor City. First, an arcade racing option, whereby racers join a server and howl along a city street or country lane, with little on the line beyond pride and a few experience points. Secondly though, is

the evocatively named Sim World, a persistent motoring environment featuring everything from illegal drag racing to scrap dealerships. In the Sim World, players will be able to purchase new cars either from a licensed dealer or from private sale or auction, rummage through junk piles for rare parts, or just hang out at a diner and chat to other drivers.

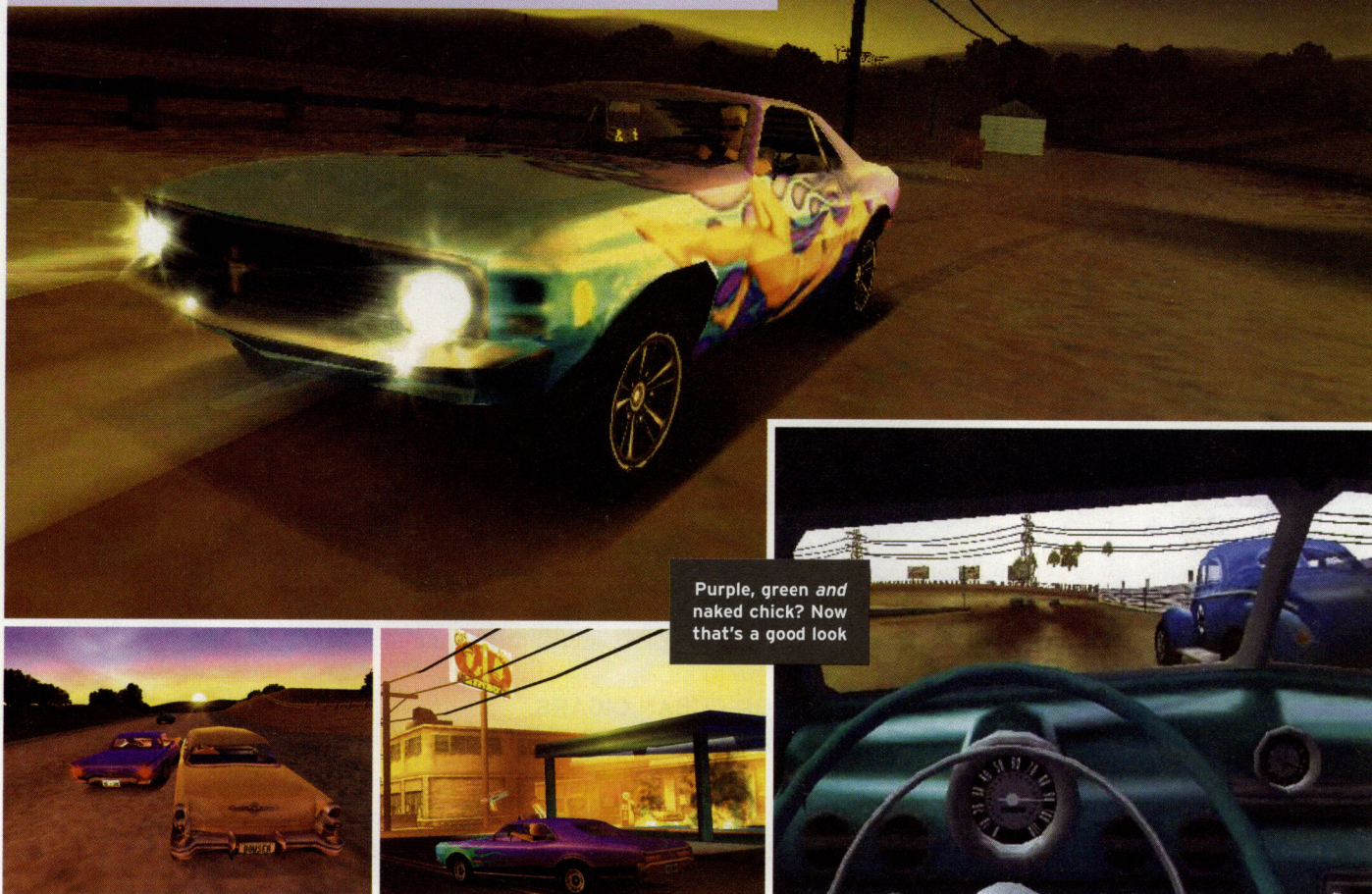
The diner is shaping up to be a refreshing take on the in-game chat room. Rather than sitting face-to-face with other drivers, the player will see an artful aerial shot of the diner with the parking lot filled with the cars of those inside. A quick glance is all you will need to see if that bugger in the canary-yellow '57 Chevy who beat you on the aqueduct circuit is inside boasting of his cheater's victory.

From this, you can see that the Sim World will also play host to races and competitions offering big virtual cash prizes and even rare cars. What's more,



## KING OF THE MOUNTAIN

While we here at PCPP are duly excited by Motor City, our anticipation simply cannot climb above a certain level unless we can be assured that the game will feature the greatest car of all time, the Holden Torana. Who can forget Brockie, King of the Mountain, in the '72 Bathurst enduro, crushing the opposition and bringing the Torana home in treacherous wet conditions? And how can we ever forgive that goose Chivas trying to push fuel reserves to the limit and ending up pushing the car the last hundred metres into pit, losing Torana the '73 event? And then of course, the classic LX Torana A9X, truly the most honoured, the most revered, the most often hugged of all the great street machines of Australia. Put it in the game EA, and we'll love you forever.



Purple, green and naked chick? Now that's a good look

players will be able to compete privately in pink slip races, where ownership of the loser's car passes to the winner.

In order to avoid the eBay character trading that until recently so plagued Everquest, Motor City will fully support item and vehicle exchange. With a fully-operating economy inside the Sim World, and a well-thought-out virtual currency, players will be able to haggle with each other over their Mustangs and Firebirds and accuse each other of selling them a lemon. In fact, it is this economic system that will allow for character classes within Motor City.

### Buyer's market

While everyone is a driver, some players will specialise in hunting down spare parts and securing good deals,

while others will be experts in tweaking and car setup. Motor City will support driving clubs, where numerous players can stake a claim on a portion of the city and defend it from rival clubs. EA envisages a play experience where the best drivers will run the race, the mechanics will tweak the cars, and once the prize money has been collected, the buyers will hit the streets to pick up even meaner machines. The game will ship with more than 50 cars, and

EA will continue in the proud Need For Speed tradition of releasing a new car every couple of weeks on the Motor City website. Initially, models from the US big three of Ford, Chevrolet and Chrysler will be offered, with other manufacturers to be supported, and no doubt an extensive network of modellers from the NFS and Motor City community adding more. How long it will take before the Holden Monaro, Torana and HSV Commodore make an appearance remains to be seen, but Motor City will focus on classic cars from the 30s through until the 70s.

With 13 neighbourhoods in which to race, from official tracks to outlaw street circuits, a hardcore enthusiast community, a persistent online world and some of the funkiest cars ever to leave Detroit (and other cities where they make cars... obviously) Motor City Online looks poised to reignite that need we know so well... the need for speed.







# Tropico

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

PopTop Studios

### PUBLISHER

Gathering of Developers

### AVAILABLE

May

### URL

[www.poptop.com](http://www.poptop.com)

**NOTORIOUS FOR HIS PASSION FOR CUBAN CIGARS, DANIEL STAINES WAS PREDICTABLY QUICK TO EMBRACE FASCISM ON A DESERT ISLAND**

**T**here's nothing funny about a dictatorship, what with all the killing, oppressing, denying of fundamental human liberties and stuff. It hardly needs to be noted that they are not exactly the best choice for genial after-dinner conversation. Except, of course, when you're talking about Banana Republics.

Banana Republics are funny. With good reason, too, as there is just so much to make fun of. Castro, for instance - there's comedic gold right there. Woody Allen saw the comedic potential inherent in Latino politics, exploiting it to the full in his 1971 satire, *Bananas*. It's been done a million times by *The Simpsons*. Australia was almost one in the early 90s. Then there's *Railroad Tycoon 2* developer, PopTop, and its forthcoming title, *Tropico*.

Set on a mythical and isolated Latin American Banana Republic, *Tropico* sees the player stepping into the muddled combat boots of a Castro-esque dictator (silly beard optional), who, through a gentle balance of political capering and constructionist administration, must expand and strengthen his grasp on power while maintaining social

stability on the tropical paradise. Sound hard? It is. Sound serious? Not a chance. As Phil Steinmeyer, project leader of *Tropico*, explained to us via a crackling two-way radio interview: "We've tried very hard to make the political arena fun, but not at the expense of any one particular group of people. The satire is stereotypical, but not mean-spirited and truly adds to the ambience [of *Tropico*]."

Humour isn't all that *Tropico* has going for it, though. Indeed, underneath the banana-flavoured comic exterior lies a deep and complex experience akin to old-school builder titles such as *Sim City*. Decisions matter, and although PopTop is going to let you rule your island the way you want, the inevitable consequences of your actions are your responsibility.

As interaction with the gameworld is limited to constructing structures within it, one must make choices about what one wishes to build so that it all adequately reflects a chosen ideological standpoint. Furthermore, these choices have to be made whilst simultaneously considering the consequences implicit in them. Should you



wish to rule as an iron-fisted Stalinist despot with factories and secret police HQs, then the expected backlash from the Churches and the ever omnipresent US will have to be taken into account.

"We don't force the player to be evil or to extol anti-social behaviour at all in *Tropico*," says Steinmeyer. "You can try to be a good-guy running a democracy and not abuse your people - the choice of how you play the game is wide open."

### Populate or perish

*Tropico* is a game where politics and administration are tied inexorably to the attitudes of a disturbingly autonomous and highly factional population. Disturbing simply because the level of detail that has gone into the characteristics of each (marvellously 3D rendered) individual citizen is incredible. Not only will each person have up to 40 different personality traits that affect their motivations and attitudes, but they also each have individual histories, educations, nationalities and political alignments which must be taken into consideration.





Presumably this is some sort of red climatological map overlay...



## STOP YER SQUINTING!

In what must be a godsend for hi-res sim gamers, Tropico utilises a unique pixel-proportion system which alters the interface according to the resolution. What this means is that if you're running the game in 1600x1200, you won't have to prematurely damage your eyes looking at tiny icons and sub-menus because they'll be the same size as if they were in 640x480. Here's hoping this innovation becomes an industry standard.

To remind you which game you're playing



each person has up to 40 personality traits that affect their motivations and attitudes

Tycoon 2 engine, Tropico will feature "3D ground for terrain realism combined with sprites for most units and buildings for maximum detail." And happily, you won't need a super-powered behemoth to run it decently.

## Germination

In fact, PopTop claims to have run the game smoothly on a mere P-200 with 32MB RAM. Of course, you might have to turn off a few bells and whistles but, hey, can you name any *other* recently released games that would run smoothly on a box like that?

Ever since Tropico was announced, we've followed its smooth development with a restrained interest. But now, as it once again takes a place in the PCPP spotlight, this has germinated into full blown anxious anticipation. With its Railroad Tycoon pedigree and obvious talent for tastefully making light of contentious issues, PopTop has moulded Tropico into a finely balanced sim title of political intrigue and old school administrative complexity. Furthermore, it's very, very funny. All that's left to say, then, is "Viva Tropico!"

It's not *how* popular you are on your island, but *who* you're popular with. Sure, you could go for the extreme Marxist mass appeal approach and try to win over the proletariat at the expense of the upper echelon and capitalist powers, but that will invariably alienate and inflame these said fatcats, inspiring them to fund your opposition or, worse, petition the US for an invasion of your island. It's all about checks and balances.

Steinmeyer elaborates on these complexities: "A player who has a very pro-communist stance will invariably see more

resistance from the pro-capitalist elements (and the United States) on his/her island and greater support from the pro-Communists. In general, communists are more numerous - this is a poor country - but less influential in some ways as the poor lack power. If the communists are upset with you, you risk a popular uprising. If the capitalists are upset, your economy will suffer, and in severe cases, the United States may invade."

Technically, the game is looking superb. Utilising what Steinmeyer describes as an evolution of the PopTop developed Railroad





# Alone in the Dark

## The New Nightmare

AFTER FINISHING THE FULL VERSION OF ALONE IN THE DARK 2 ON OUR COVERDISC, TIMOTHY C. BEST TURNS OUT THE LIGHTS, LOCKS ALL THE DOORS AND WINDOWS, AND HIDES UNDER HIS BED...

### DETAILS

**DEVELOPER**  
Darkworks

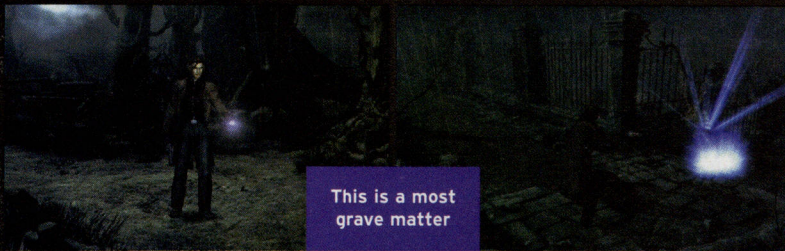
**PUBLISHER**  
Infogrames

**AVAILABLE**  
July

**URL**  
[www.aloneinthedark.com](http://www.aloneinthedark.com)



See The New Nightmare in action and those realtime shadows will astound



This is a most grave matter

## HP LOVECRAFT

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born in 1890 and died in 1937 and became a cult writing figure in the 1920s and 1930s. He was a scholar as well as a fiction writer and he wrote a history of Quebec among other non-fiction works.

He is also generally recognised as the most important American horror writer of the 20th century. His tales tell that our way of life, reality and way of thought only survive because old ones, such as Cthulhu, sleep and of the inexplicably wrong (not supernatural or unnatural, but anti-natural) creatures trying to wake them and bring the nightmare of our "natural" world to an end.

The horrible truth of all this drives Lovecraft's heroes insane, but without the truth there is no way to fight... so they are drawn into a cycle where only the right door will drive them completely over the edge into a living hell.



**I**t's late at night and I find myself typing. It's the only release for shadows that clank around in my head, behind my eyes. It's the only thing that makes the horror recede a little and make me think that maybe I'm not too far gone.

Let me tell you, I have known creeping horror before. Like the time stuck on the wrong side of the tracks and the people I thought were my friends, people who had slowly and carefully built the illusion over many years, trapped me kilometres away from public transport and without enough money for a taxi and then announced we were all going to see "Dude Where's My Car".

The time when I was seeing a girl and everything is going well but then there was the CD rack and in it every Roxette album ever made - they made twelve albums? Then you look across and something inside you cringes and backs away as you get firsthand knowledge that there are a similar number of Celine Dion CDs on the open market.

Horror is all about knowing that something is wrong, even more so than the evidence would suggest, and knowing that there's a good chance you'll have to deal with it and that when you do you'll be handing madness your telephone number and saying "call me" with a cheeky grin on your face. My friend Edward Carnby is a real lady's man when it comes to flirting with madness and dread.

### Carnby

Over many years Edward Carnby has faced his share of horror, surviving three well-documented brushes with the supernatural from the creepy mansion of the first incident to the voodoo of the second and ghost town of the third. These were known as the Alone in the Dark Trilogy. Throughout all of this it was the creeping horror and Lovecraft-ian terror of the initial mansion that kept Carnby up at nights. Taking clues from that first incident a sinister organisation called Darkworks is creating "The New Nightmare" for him.

I discovered one of the puppeteers, a lead "game" designer, named **Pascal Luban**. When I confronted him I learnt that again Carnby seems to have become the unwitting pawn of powers beyond his control. Beyond that, it seems Darkworks had Carnby reborn just for the effort:

"The original Carnby was a turn-of-the-century character," Luban explains quietly. "We wanted something more modern to begin with. Then, we wanted to give him an aura of mystery. His origin is unknown to him. Does he have (American) Indian blood? That gives us lot of room for other episodes."

"Finally, we needed an action-oriented character because the game was to rely heavily on combat. By the way, did you notice Carnby's custom-made colt. It features a double barrel. Carnby is no sissy."

Just talking to man sends shivers down my spine. What have they resurrected Carnby for? Why does he need such a big gun? I soon come to suspect the answer is so that he doesn't die too quickly. And Luban casually adds that, "terror is not incompatible with meaty weapons."

our main drive was to create horror... we imagined gruesome ways of being attacked and built the creatures around that

### Location, Location, Location

It would seem that Darkworks has a slaved to create a nasty little piece of real estate in which to set its deadly drama. With a murdered friend and Carnby's own little Mulder-cum-Crow take on the supernatural it would seem Luban and his shady co-conspirators are pulling all the right strings to get him there.

Luban talks gleefully of the individuals he and his friends have managed to assemble on Shadow Island. "Personally, the characters of the game give me the creeps."

He edges forward before going on. "To begin with, the inhabitants of the islands live secluded from the continent. Some of them are utterly mad, hating the rest of mankind and carrying out their insane plan. Others are not evil but make you very uneasy."



A clue to the evil science at the heart of the plot? Or maybe not...

That'll ruin his dashing coat

## STILL LOVING HP'S CRAFT

Lovecraft's legacy even extends to the Necronomicon, made famous by artist H.R. Giger and Evil Dead movies and he spawned a whole genre of horror known as the Cthulhu Mythos. The original *Alone in the Dark* definitely falls into that genre, as does *The X-Files*.

It should also be noted that the creator of the *Call of Cthulhu* pen-and-paper RPG Sandy Petersen lent his Lovecraft-ian expertise to monster design for *Doom* and *Quake*. So if any of the Cthulhu-ian creatures seem familiar it is because they have been drawn on for generations.

might be a "little bit old", being from an era of horror of unseen terrors more befitting books than visual and interactive games, Luban says he was a major source of the game's atmosphere.

I bet Lovecraft's heroes would have liked access to a launcher that fires burning magnesium disks for ammo. Then again, in *Lovecraft* they would probably have been more a danger to themselves. Even with the arsenal, *The New Nightmare's* action is a tool for the horror, not the other way round. That would be too easy on poor Carnby, as Luban says deviously, "our main drive was to create horror, not gore."

Luban continues: "We tried to imagine gruesome ways of being attacked and we built the creatures around that. When the player will hear the sound heralding the presence of a specific monster, we want him or her to think: Oh no, not that one!"

Once the guns are blazing the feel of panic will be kept unabated in several ways. There will be monsters that just seem to soak up ammo until every shot makes you wonder if it's going to be followed by an empty click. Then there are the monsters who swarm you, crawling out of the dark places.

Of course the panic comes in as a combination of all of the above spinning into an unnatural and eerie locale where the still times are worse than the action. Add into that the cracking of twigs and haunting score and you really have something.

"When you explore a cemetery at night, you know you are looking for trouble. The horror generated by the gothic dimension of the location is enhanced by the sound design of the game. Sound is often more important than visual to carry emotions," says Luban.

Obviously, Villette's creations even scare Luban: "This is what makes them so scary to me: I believe in them. If you want to go deeper into the game... get to know the characters you meet. Read the texts; ponder on their actions and behavior. *Shadow Island* will capture you."

Apparently this island is quite an elaborate setup. Darkworks disrupted the work of many fine bookworms rifling the pages of tomes of 19th century New England architecture. It should be noted Salem is in New England and that these Yanks are the guys who thought it would be cool to build big old gothic mansions around the sites of several witch burnings and with a disregard for native burial grounds.

Beside the obligatory mansion, the island also

features good old-fashioned overgrown and decadent-cum-nasty gardens, a swamp (always good for crazy hermits), a forest, a beachhead, underground areas including tunnels and caves as well as an old fort.

### Things that go bump

Architecture books weren't the only reading that the Darkworks team took in. Although Villette mentioned that Lovecraft

Behind it all he describes people off of the island, people working in the shadow like puppeteers.

The *New Nightmare* is a step away from the more outlandish and cartoony action of the second and third chapters in Carnby's *Alone in the Dark* episodes and will harken back to the first game with its cinematic feel, spooky stillness and

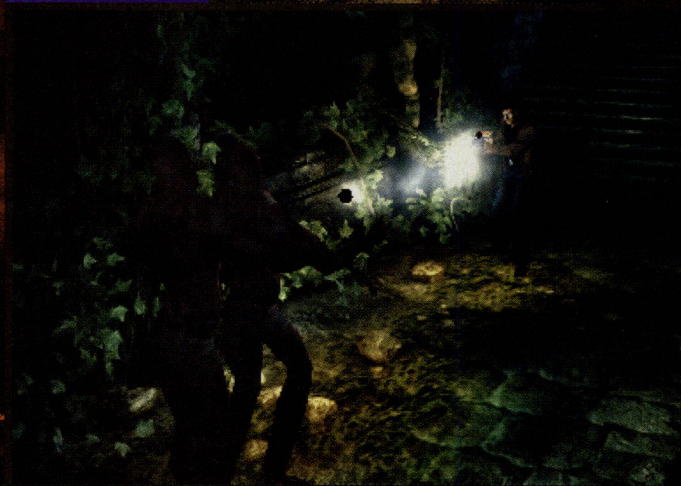
the inclusion of another character on the island with whom Carnby can't help but bond is as brilliant as it is evil... now Carnby gets to fear for two

unexpected surprises. The story has been carefully developed to build slowly to a crescendo, with world conquering villains that are anything but cartoonish. Luban talks of the other pawns in this new *Nightmare*, saying that Antoine Villette, the mastermind huddling behind the title of Darkworks Managing Director, has done a wonderful job of giving the villains and story a real depth.





Aline introduces you to her new little friend...



Eat burning magnesium!



## Fear for two

There is also another hook in this new adventure into creepsville... another person out there in the dark. Darkworks was not happy to draw Carnby into this mess alone. He wouldn't have enough to lose. Aline Cedrac is also on the island, looking for her missing father.

Luben explains the devious plan: "Both characters play the same but their adventures are truly different. They visit different locations, have to solve different puzzles and they discover the story from two different points of view.

"For instance, Carnby will find out that one of the characters living on the island (don't count on me to tell you which one!) is a prisoner and the player does not know how he got there but Aline will witness his capture!"

Although both players will still be alone in the dark, using their radios they will be able to try contact each other at any given time. Obviously, some times will be better than others and hopefully Carnby will have the presence of mind to record a "sorry I can't take your call I'm currently battling nameless horrors with a plasma torch" message.

When Carnby or Aline do manage to raise the other they will be rewarded with frantic messages or "spirited answers" which relate directly to what's happening.

Darkworks inclusion of another character on the island with whom Carnby can't help but bond is as brilliant as it is evil... now Carnby gets to fear for two.

"We chose this unique storytelling approach because it develops a unique team spirit, a spirit of belonging to a team," Luban elaborates. "Whether you play with Aline or Carnby, you know that you are not alone. Someone else is out there. Someone that can help you but also someone you must take care of." When you are indulging in terror you might as well do it right. Luban promises a unique experience for people willing to play both characters games concurrently, using the saves often.

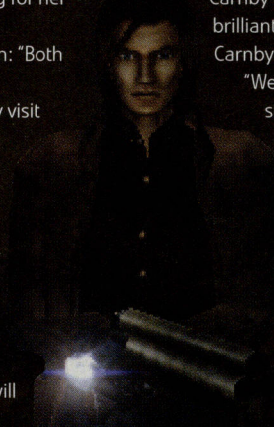
## Horror Noir

Even if Villette has said that Darkworks was more influenced by the first Alone in the Dark than by Lovecraft, I have discovered a lot of the master of the horror of the unseen in what will beset my friend Carnby. Maybe he was trying to warn of the efforts of those such as Darkworks. The creatures the developer has created are the same horrible and illogically twisted beasts that we have seen wherever Lovecraft's words shaped creature features.

Poor Carnby seems set for a return to the type of suspense and shocks that used to keep him waking in cold sweats from his first brush with the supernatural all those years ago. Schlock horror is out and Cthulhu creeping madness is back in. Carnby and Aline seem to have been set on a star-crossed collision course leading to darkness and insanity.

As I turn to ask Luban another question, a ray of light creeps through the window, the first of the day, and Luban hastily pulls back... were they scales I saw? Or was it just the caffeine, long shadows and Twin Peaks soundtrack? I try follow Luban to get a better look but he ducks out the front door with surprising and sinuous quickness. Another day Luben!

Now my only hope is that this can somehow help Carnby with what lies ahead... and that I can get that vision of the complete Roxette collection out of my head.







IRRATIONAL GAMES AUSTRALIA ON...

# FREEDOM FORCE

PART 3



AFTER DESIGNING THE BRILLIANT SYSTEM SHOCK 2, IRRATIONAL SET UP AN OFFICE IN CANBERRA. THIS IS THE TALE OF THE TEAM'S FIRST GAME...



This is just placeholder dialogue, fortunately

el\_diablo: Hot stuff comin' through



**H**i all and welcome once again to another instalment of the Freedom Force developer diary! This time I want to give you an insight into the workings of the Freedom Force art team. Our job is creating lots of yummy content and making sure it's up to scratch from an artistic, technical and historical standpoint.

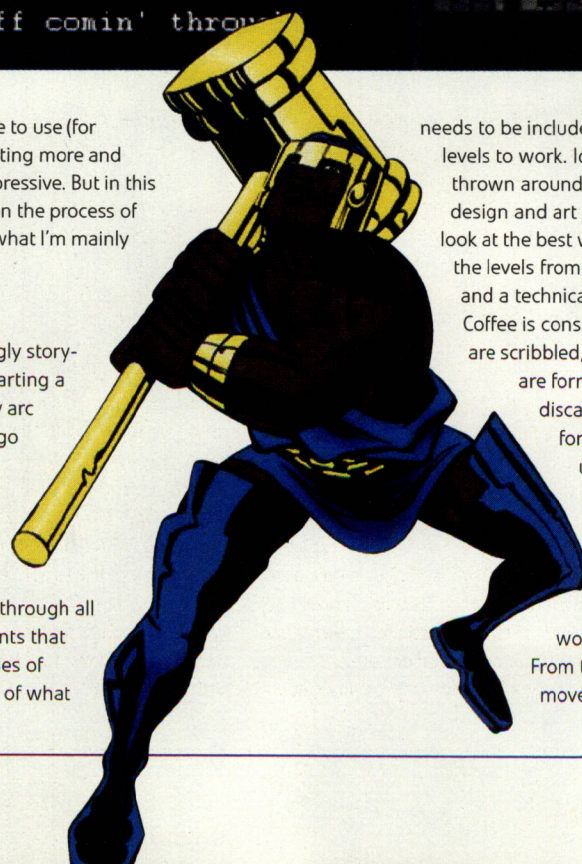
The three main areas we are working on at the moments are levels, characters and special effects. A huge amount of work is currently underway on all three of these areas. The number of characters (both heroes and villains) is growing all the time

and the powers they have to use (for both good or evil) are getting more and more destructive and impressive. But in this diary I'm going to focus on the process of creating levels, as that's what I'm mainly involved with.

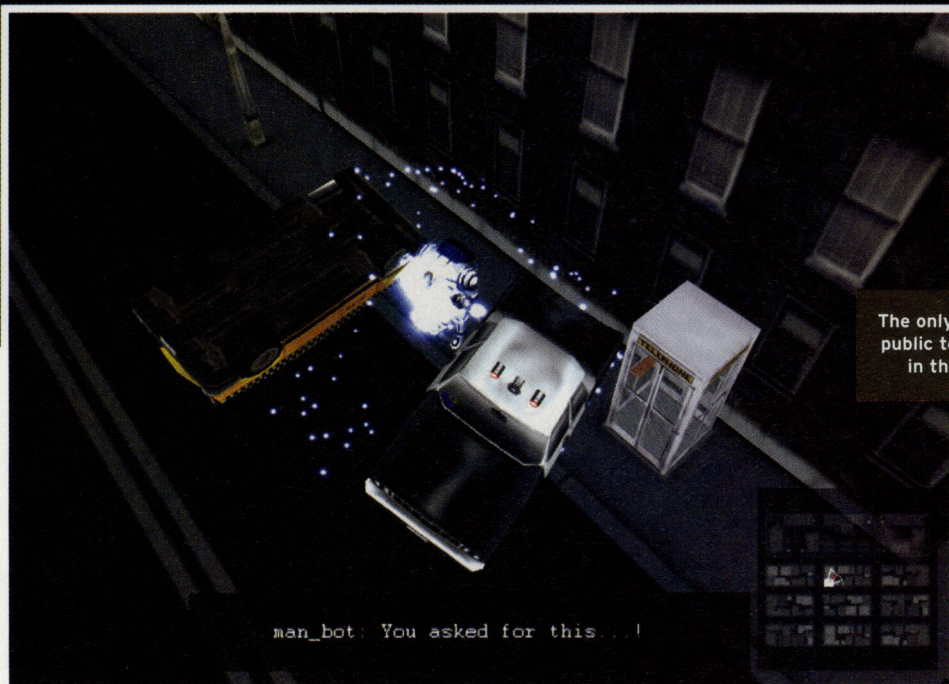
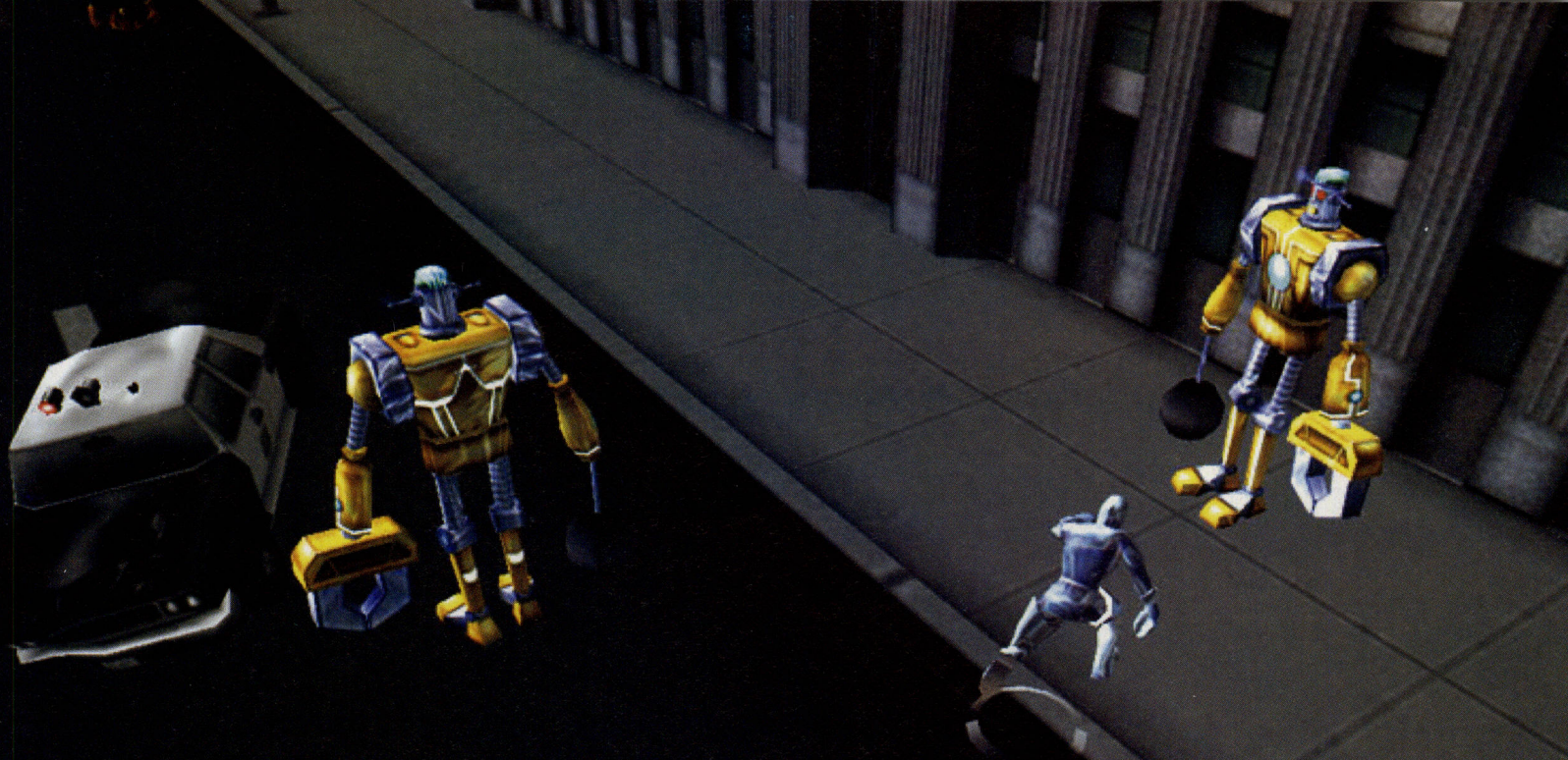
## Plot elements

Freedom Force is a strongly story-driven game, so when starting a series of levels for a story arc we always sit down and go through what has happened in the story so far and what new twists are introduced in the levels we are going to work on. We go through all the important plot elements that take place during the series of missions and create a list of what

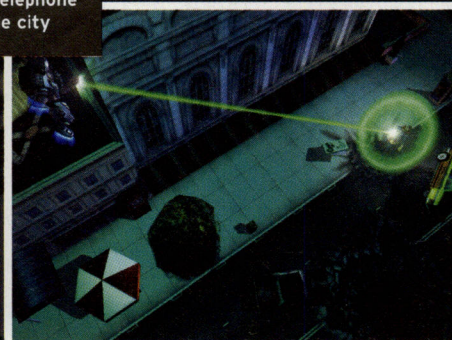
needs to be included for the levels to work. Ideas are thrown around by both design and art teams as we look at the best way to create the levels from a gameplay and a technical perspective. Coffee is consumed, notes are scribbled, and ideas are formed and then discarded and formed again until we all have a clear idea in our minds of what we are working to build. From there we move on to







The only working public telephone in the city



actually creating the levels. There are some artistic elements that we re-use in between levels in Freedom Force. Not every level needs to have its own completely unique set of buildings although it might have to include a few key locations. Also a lot of city street objects look the same no matter where you are in New York City. After the meeting we go and work out what elements are unique to this story arc and we start the creation process for those objects.

#### Aerial photography

Creating objects starts with a visit to our in-house resource library. Piles of books, stacks of comics, videos and bitmaps have been gathered from every possible location on many different topics all related to New York City and the 1960s comic book world we are making. Looking through it now I can see collections of The Fantastic Four, New York City guidebooks, large books full of aerial photography, a copy of Breakfast At Tiffany's and

too many other things to name. If I look through the resources we have gathered on the computer I can see directories telling me where to look for pictures of cars, billboards, fashion, street signs, lamp posts and the list just goes on and on. After a trip through all of this information you generally find what you need to start making authentic 1960s objects.

Next comes one of my favourite parts of making Freedom Force. When the object is finished and approved and tested out in the game you move onto the next phase of making the world more real. You break it. Not in an "Ummmmm... this doesn't work anymore" way but in a "Superhero A has just thrown Object C at a Villain B and it broke across his head!" sort of a way. For years people have wanted games where they could destroy more things in the world if not EVERYTHING in the game world. Freedom Force is that sort of game and it's so much fun to make it that way! Crash! Crack! Zap! BOOM!!!! Ahem...

#### Garbage cans

So now that they are created, smashed and broken, our objects are done and it's time to put them into the level. Just one member of the team does level set-up as the rest of us move on to creating more objects and buildings to destroy. Objects and buildings are placed around the terrain primarily to conform to all the discussion we had earlier about the gameplay for that level, but also to bring a sense of realism to the game. For instance, in the city levels you will find rubbish, boxes and garbage cans down alleyways that have no bearing upon the storyline but help make the city look all the more authentic.

Now that it's all put together and tested the process begins again. There are still many more objects that need to be made and destroyed and many more exciting new areas that the Freedom Force team will have to visit in order to save the day!

Michael Blake  
3D Artist, Irrational Games





# ROLEPLAYING REVIVAL

THE ORCS ARE BACK!

BY JOHN DEWHURST  
TIMOTHY C BEST  
RYAN HOVINGH  
DANIEL STAINES





"HOLD THERE, TRAVELLER! MARRY AND WELL MET! IN THIS MERRY INN, I BE THE RECALLER OF STORIES-TOLD-&-FORGOT WOULDST THOU HEARE OF DUNGEONS AND OF DRAGONS? BY THE LOOK ON THY VISAGE, PERHAPS NOT METHINKS THOU HAST HEARD AFORE THIS TALE... OR THINKS THOU HAST HEARD IT THINKS I SAYE, FOR TIS A TALE THAT MANY HAVE CLOSED THARE EARS TO IN THE DAYS OF YORE, AFORE COMPUTERE GAMES, THE BRAVE AND FOOLISHE PLUNDERED DUNGEONS TO ROTTE THINE BRAINS..."

**R**oleplaying games (RPGs) invite you to become something you are not. Regardless of whether the RPG is pen-&-paper or a computer RPG (CRPG), you have the chance to play as a completely unique individual in a responsive, dynamic, fantasy world.

You choose exactly what kind of person you are. You adventure, you develop and you change - and you must face the consequences of your actions. There isn't another gaming experience like it.

Before we glimpse some of the newest RPG titles, let's look back at the origins of computer roleplaying. In this case, the biggest pen-&-paper RPG system in the world: Dungeons & Dragons (D&D).

Many experienced CRPG gamers have never tried what their favourite games are based on: roleplaying D&D campaigns. Baldur's Gate 2, Icewind Dale and Planescape: Torment are all based on the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (AD&D) rules system. Let's see where D&D came from and what makes it tick.

#### Classic creations

D&D was created in 1972 by two guys, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. Back then, they were fans of roleplaying war and board games. They created a unique role playing game set in a medieval world with some fantasy elements. In the original D&D, there was no need for miniature figures and boards, and each person in the group - or party - played an individual character who gained experience over time, with

settings included The Forgotten Realms, Ravenloft and Dragonlance. This is the game that took over the world in the 1980s.

Being the most popular roleplaying medium, AD&D made the transition to computer gaming smooth and logical. SSI held the exclusive license for AD&D games from 1988 to 1995, and produced some genuine classics of the RPG genre: Pool of Radiance (the first SSI game) and Eye of the Beholder. CRPGs had a

## D&D IS REALLY A SITUATION OF COMMUNAL STORYTELLING

one person as dungeon master (DM) of the adventure. The DM controlled all of the action - basically told the story and dictated the game.

In 1978 Advanced Dungeons & Dragons was released. This was D&D organised in more detail and with more rules. AD&D began to feature many new settings, or universes, for play. These

significant following during this period and after, but the fortunes of AD&D fell as pen-&-paper gaming lost popularity.

The RPG that really led the return to the "old school" was Fallout in 1997. After Fallout came Interplay's major success, Baldur's Gate (set in The Forgotten Realms), and the rest is history.





These games led to a revival in pen-&paper role playing and this seems to be an angle that Wizards of the Coast (the owner and publisher of D&D) is willing to use to bring the PC gaming community to more traditional roleplaying.

The first revision of AD&D (the 2nd edition) was released in 1988. Since then the game has changed considerably. The complexities involved in playing the game ten years later with the

CRPGs have become distinct from their roleplaying origins and have a number of hallmarks. Most feature a number of major quests and a whole bunch of sub-quests, that help to add depth to proceedings. Development of character is fairly central to any roleplaying experience. Character generation in CRPGs has a wide scope - in some you simply choose your class; others you choose race, class and assign

all in CRPGs, meaning that computer roleplayers remain in large part blissfully unaware of them.

CRPGs have drifted from their origins. And rightly so because the two are altogether different experiences. Some of the conventions of roleplaying (like turn-based combat) don't seem immediately relevant to a PC game in the present climate. Similarly, concepts that are common to CRPGs are irrelevant to D&D. These are some of the reasons that PC gamers haven't naturally progressed to D&D. The trend back to the roots of D&D, in such games as Baldur's Gate 2, Icewind Dale and the games previewed in this issue, brings us to pen-&paper D&D. What is it? How is it played? Let's take a look.

## SOME CONVENTIONS OF ROLEPLAYING DON'T SEEM RELEVANT TO A PC GAME

same rules have certainly helped to turn some people away. To entice them back the 3rd edition was released last year. The most significant improvement is a simplification of many aspects of the game, as well as dropping the A - it's just D&D now. A number of games previewed in the following pages were produced under the new 3rd Edition rules.

### Personal army

CRPGs seek to simulate the excitement of the D&D experience. The story, graphical and combat systems - very different aspects, more so these days than in the past - would all need to be strong for a coherent game. This has meant that the RPGs needed to be fairly all round games.

statistics. Another roleplaying convention is the gaining of experience. This can be made apparent in a simple sense i.e. by gaining strength, spells, etc. or in the distribution of skill points in various categories, as in the Fallout games.

Mainly because CRPGs are largely played solo, most games have had the opportunity to differ greatly from traditional D&D. This has meant that games could be exclusively action affairs (Diablo I & II) or narratives more akin to adventure games (Planescape: Torment). In RPGs where you gathered a party, your fellow travellers are more likely to be a personal army - since you are the focus - but in some games are well-rounded individuals. Also much of the detail in the mechanics of D&D is not present at





## The Pen & Paper thing

For the D&D novice, let's have a look at how the average game works. The basics of D&D have been the same from the beginning. The game is played in a group, often around a table, where the events are discussed between the Dungeon Master and the party. You have the party - which consists of any number of adventurers (a comfortable sized party is between four and seven) and you have the Dungeon Master (DM). The rule set includes the DM's guide, player's handbooks, the relevant dice, character sheets and lots of cliches about fast food (well, hopefully not the last one).

Many of the actions in D&D involve rolling dice. By rolling dice, within the structure of the game, the haphazardness of reality comes into play. After choosing the race and class of your character (fighter, thief, paladin, wizard, cleric, etc), you'll need to roll for your character's abilities. You allocate these rolled scores to different abilities. So you might choose to be a highly intelligent wizard or a dexterous thief or a powerful fighter.

The Dungeon Master's role is to bring an adventure to the table for the characters to play and present it. Oftentimes it can be a very simple affair: exploring a deserted mine or rescuing a kidnapped princess. The DM sets the scene, tells the story and dictates what happens in conversation and in battle - the DM is your "interface" to the game. The DM also speaks for the characters you encounter in the game, like the mayor, the high priestess, etc.

Once everyone has established who they are, the adventure can begin. The DM starts the adventure, telling the story. The characters tell the story of what they will do in each situation. D&D is really a situation of communal storytelling, where the DM has the final say over what happens. The style of play can vary greatly from a narrative-heavy drama to a hack-n-slash action adventure. Most adventures settle somewhere between these two extremes.

The beauty of roleplaying in this way is that the possibilities are literally boundless. In a CRPG, you get one quality adventure that can be replayed again and again at your discretion. In D&D, EVERY adventure can be radically different and the game only ends when you decide it ends - you can play for months or years building a character. In D&D, you are only limited by the imagination of your DM, your fellow adventurers and yourself.

The 3rd Edition of D&D is newly revised and, according to experienced roleplayers, it's simpler than ever before. Restrictions in earlier versions - no multi-classing and class restrictions - are largely gone. Maybe you tried it years ago and lost interest; maybe you haven't tried it yet - regardless, now is the perfect time. It's well worthwhile, if only to see where your favourite game is coming from.

*"So goode traveller, hast thou had enoughe of mine tale yet? Thou seemst eager to heare more of the tales that followe. Verily, thou seemst ready to trye many a new thinge. Prithee, spare some coppers for thine poore cold storyteller?*

*May the goddess bless and good nighte!"*

## POWERPLAY ROLEPLAY

The PCPP faithful gathered recently to test out the newest D&D rules set, the 3rd Edition. While there are a few experienced roleplayers in the PCPP camp, the majority had never experienced pen & paper D&D. The adventure would take us to an isolated town being harassed by evil goings on. The adventure took place in a deserted mine, crypt and dungeons filled with goblins, unicorns, traps and necromancers. Heated party debates were a highlight as much as battle, as each character sought their own outcomes from situations. This led to a definite splintering in the party. The zealots, Shinji and Aramil found a common goal in religion. The chaotic characters, Cerrewyd and Psappha found some common ground but not a firm alliance. Fortran's such a big mother, no-one had the nerve to piss him off. Luckily he seems to be happy just cutting people up and pounding his chest. Here is the role call of our intrepid explorers:



### ARAMIL CHAOTIC GOOD CLERIC

This holy man pursues justice for the commonfolk, pondering the moral dilemmas of warfare and piety.

ETHOS: I seek goodness above all else. Where people suffer I seek to aid them, even if it is their leaders who bring them to suffering. Laws do not bind me - neither does greed

PLAYER: March Stepnik

Quote: "But we can't defile this tomb... the dead are resting in there."



### SHINJI TRUE LAWFUL MONK

The silent monk's intentions are unknown. He seeks justice but his truth - that is not of concern to you.

ETHOS: As a monk, I must maintain the order of the gods. I learn of the world and bring logic and reason to it. But I have left my brethren behind...

PLAYER: David Wildgoose

Quote: "I'll take the first watch and meditate."



### PSAPPHA TRUE CHAOTIC SORCEROR

An evil opportunist, Psappha seeks profit and power. Any concern for the party echoes his need for self-preservation.

ETHOS: Mercy is folly, cruelty is power. Hatred burns up in me and there is nothing - not creature or word - that cannot be drained to fuel my greatness.

PLAYER: John Dewhurst

Quote: "So I'll give the rest of you the potions, if you let me kill the unicorn..."



### CERREWYD CHAOTIC GOOD DRUID

This forest dweller travels for adventure. She is protective of nature and believes in the goodness of the natural order.

ETHOS: These other city dwellers are curious and in my wilderness home, I hold power over them. I protect nature and those who show it respect.

PLAYER: Agata Budinska

Quote: "Can I roll that again?"



### FORTRAN TRUE NEUTRAL BARBARIAN

Fortran is the big guy with the sword. He's also known by his Austrian accent and powerful one-line battlecries.

ETHOS: FORTRAN BIG. FORTRAN POWERFUL. FORTRAN EAT AND DRINK AND REST. WHEN FORTRAN REST - FORTRAN SMAAASSSH!

PLAYER: James Cottee

Quote: "FORTRAN SMAAASSSH!"

The D&D experience is closer to CRPGs than you might expect. Once the mechanics of D&D become more natural, the game becomes very close to an adventure that you'd experience in Baldur's Gate for example. Roleplaying a character and alignment proved the biggest challenge and produced the friction that kept things interesting. As gamers, having to deal with other people in a cooperative fashion made for exciting play. The event has become a permanent fixture on the monthly calendar. Keep your eyes peeled for updates of our exploits!



# POOL OF RADIANCE 2

## RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR

It's time for another crack at that pesky pool, 13 years later and an edition of D&D further on...

DEVELOPER STORMFRONT STUDIOS

PUBLISHER SSI

DUE DATE LATE MAY

URL [WWW.POOLOFRADIANCE.COM](http://WWW.POOLOFRADIANCE.COM)

In the Forgotten Realms of D&D, when parents want to scare their children out of adventuring (after the tykes watch reruns of the A-Team on the old crystal ball set) they bring up Myth Drannor. There's a place for bad little boys playing with swords after bedtime...

Pool of Radiance 2: Ruins of Myth Drannor starts with you assembling a team of 1st level characters and having them charge off to this unfortunate locale to save the veteran team who were actually given the quest. Just to sort out any misconceptions: your team is not the best of the best. That was the team that just got its clock cleaned. In the haunted, devil-plagued Myth Drannor, first level characters come somewhere below the shrubbery on the food chain.

Chuck Yager, the game's associate producer assures us that Stormfront has used all of the original source material from the Ruins of Myth Drannor Forgotten Realms supplements with only a little tweaking.



Pool uses an isometric view while indoors



"Several things, such as the tweaked divination spells and mythal ghosts, seemed beyond the purview of this title, but others, like the blue glow moss and some common denizens, were just fine to implement. Of course, we had to explain away the phaerimm and baatezu or there really wouldn't be much room for a low level party indeed!"

The team at Stormfront should be trusted with a little latitude to work their magic. They have an impressive pedigree having worked on a couple of the original Gold Box games as well as the AD&D castle-building game, Stronghold, and AOL's original Neverwinter Nights. They also have consultants working with them covering

virtually every other Gold Box game, including the original Pool of Radiance. They know their phaerimm from their baatezu.

### Good things come in threes

Stormfront has taken the 3rd edition D&D rules and made sure the game is also in the 3rd dimension. The buildings have all been drafted in 3D and the creature and character models have been lovingly sculpted. The monsters are set to be quite spectacular with promises that some of them will be so large that they take up 75% of the screen (colossal dragons anyone?).

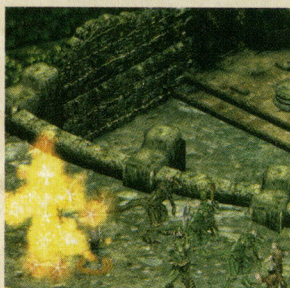
The bigish humanoids (giants, golems, etc) and even the moderately large Ormyrr look amazing next to the properly scaled human characters. The player's party is truly dwarfed by these ancient beings. The characters may be small but they are being paid special care - after all, you do have to look at them on every screen. For each race there are several basic models which are modified by class and equipment. It's obvious even the people working on the game are impressed by the way the characters are coming to life.

"Sure the backgrounds are beautiful and the monsters are engaging, but the actual characters themselves move, breathe, run and look more alive than in any other RPG I have seen thus far," says Yager.

## WE HAVE MASTERED DOORS!

In Baldur's Gate 2 I managed to steal an adamantite golem's treasure and then make a getaway by closing a flimsy wooden door on the huge juggernaut of destruction. Phew, that was close! Yager has some bad news for me about the bad guys in Pool of Radiance 2: "Not only can they open doors, but they use terrain to their most effective advantage at higher levels, coming at you from elevated platforms and from behind decent cover.

"Since we are utilising line of sight for most spells and missile fire, this creates a tactical concern when you get in a pinch and four Cult warriors are raining down arrows on your party from behind grating on the second floor. We tried to scale the AI as the player progressed in game, so that the beginning encounters aren't geniuses on the field of battle, but the ending ones sure are."

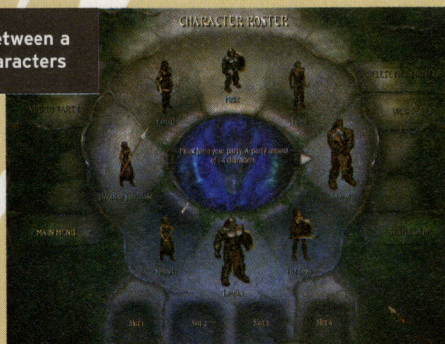




Check out the gorgeous reflections on the floor



Choose between a dozen characters



### Life in the Big City

Myth Drannor itself has been pulled from the Forgotten Realms source material and is as accurate as possible. The team took a map of the area, tiled it and scanned it in and then went to work converting it into an isometric view. Finally, one of the artists with an architecture background designed the buildings from the ground up in 3D.

Present are all the lovely sites from the old dwarven centre of commerce, the fortified House of Gems, complete with ghosts of dwarves too stubborn to fade away. Then there's the ancient

"I personally love the half-orc, who stands at around eight foot tall - and which we measured against the other races in the scale of the game to keep accurate - and can wield the largest weapons with ease; dress him up in some plate mail and you have got a big issue on your hands!

"A second thing that I am enamoured with is the spell visuals in game. It just seems to add more flair to the fireball when it trails smoke behind it and sends sparks shooting up when it detonates."

Just looking around the page will tell you that Yager isn't just blowing smoke when it comes to these details. The spell effects are some of the most generous yet seen, while each character does manage to stand out even when in similar equipment to his or her comrades.

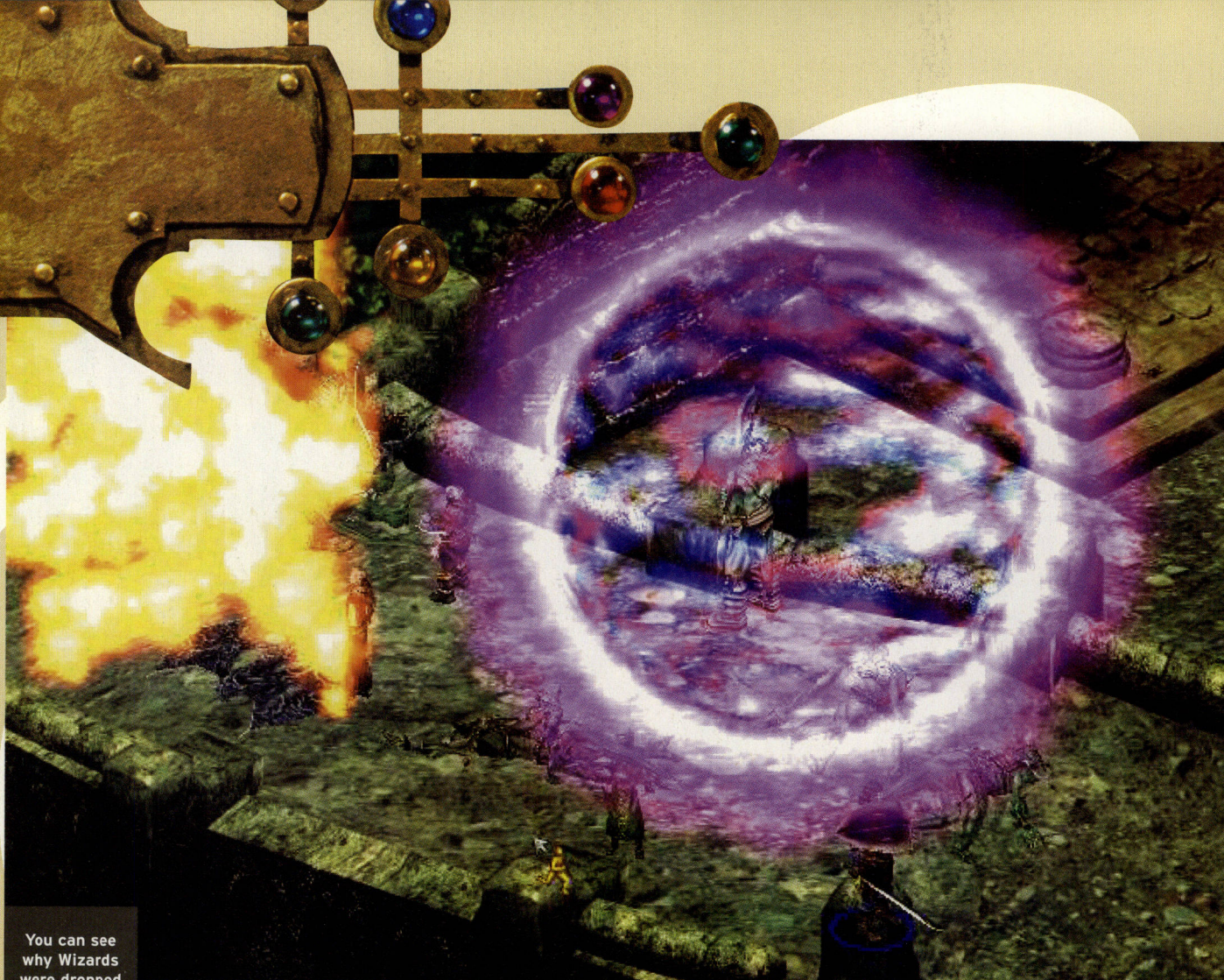
## THE ACTUAL CHARACTERS LOOK MORE ALIVE THAN IN ANY OTHER RPG

However, all of this has come at a cost, says Yager. "Neither gnomes nor bards or druids were ever part of the original spec, and even when we went back to add the paladin and monk, it was either those two or the gnome... there's only so much an art department can do under the gun. We opted for what we felt was more bang for the buck." Wizards have also been cut. Stormfront wanted to showcase the way the new 3rd edition Sorcerer worked over the Wizard who is less flexible, casts fewer spells and wouldn't be able to use item creations abilities.

Elven fortress with strange creatures lofting in its soaring heights and beautiful caverns below. There are destroyed and over-grown gardens. Tunnel systems which have been completely remodelled for Beautiful Homes and Lairs. Churches with beautiful elven princesses ready to return to defend the faith. In the depths there is also a pool waiting and a dragon cult doing whatever cults do (probably involving dracoliches, knowing what they're like).

Not all of the characters you encounter will be vile. Some, like the armoured, four-armed,





You can see why Wizards were dropped in favour of Sorcerers



## COMBAT: SOMETHING GOLD

The turn-based combat system harks back to the old Gold Box games where every character gets an initiative score and then acts in turn. For multiplayer many people find waiting a drag, so Stormfront has also added a timing feature which allows the game's host to set a limit on how long you have to decide each character's action. This can be as short as three seconds. The combat system includes almost all of the 3rd edition rules, including attacks of opportunity, partial actions, delayed actions, sneak attacks, surprise and so on, as well as the combat feats and special abilities like the monk's stunning strike which get specy effects like motion blur.



giant and wormlike Ormyrr are neutral and will help you depending on your words. Others are out for vengeance against their drow brethren. You start the game generating four characters, but you can fill the roster out to six. Interestingly, you can substitute out all of your starting characters if you want.

"Throughout the course of the game, you run across a total of eight NPCs that will join your party and a host of others that won't," adds Yager.

"It is up to whether or not you let them join up, but should you choose not to, they can usually be found later on in sections of the game if you change your mind. As for doing their own thing, some NPCs have their own agendas, but if they are in your party, they are doing your thing."

When you are trying to woo NPCs, keep in mind that the game uses branching dialogue with mutually exclusive options. If the information in the speech tree is mission

critical, the developer has made sure that you can get to it. Though sometimes you'll have to prioritise between missions and which one you really want the low-down on. Things such as character alignment and what else you have done will also influence speech options and hence the information you are told and side quests you get.

### Progressive thought

Naturally, the game has been designed so that the missions get harder as you progress in levels. The first few levels are meant to go pretty quickly as you rack up cool magic goodies and can escape the gardens that hold such measly creatures that the bigger bad guys don't even bother going there.

Like the original Pool of Radiance there will be the main storyline encounters as well as lots of side quests which will wind together giving a

non-linear feel to the game. Apparently, Ruins of Myth Drannor also keeps track of your characters and their quests and opens up certain things and challenges as you progress. With the branching dialogue this could produce some dramatically different games, even with a very similar Drannor crawling group.

Crawling through the wreckage of Myth Drannor will be different to both the Gold Box games and the Baldur's Gate games in that Stormfront has made the city seamless. There are no distinctly different map sections to load; the city is one, very large, adventure o' doom.

During this adventure, characters will be able to rise to 16th level in one class with a maximum of 32 levels split freely between different classes. Hence multi-classing is highly favoured, allowing you to get twice as many levels as being a single class. I guess a 5th level fighter, 15th level rogue and a 12th level sorcerer would make a fair substitute bard.





### Magic Items

There is so much to mention beyond the setting of this game and what it looks like. Character creation has become less random, giving players a number of points to distribute, thus avoiding the hours of rolling many players indulge in.

Originally, one of the most exciting aspects of this game in development was the interactive environments which would let player push objects around sealing doors, throwing (or flipping) tables in the way of advancing creatures so they would have to go around or

could open up. Unfortunately, this has had to be dropped because of the pathing nightmares it was causing the AI.

Although elements like the interactive environments had to be dropped and some of the classes and class options are limited, the real strength of the game is tied to graphics, sound and atmosphere. That strength is the ability to explore one of the great mysteries and deeply magical places in the Realms in vainglorious 3D.

This game has the looks; ultimately, it will live or die on the story it weaves and the characters that hold it all together. With Stormfront's experience there should be more than enough to encourage another dip in the pool.

## BRANCHING DIALOGUE COULD PRODUCE DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT GAMES

Skills and feats have also been simplified with the computer assigning set ones to classes as you go up levels. There are also such simple improvements as colour-coded rest areas; some places being dead-safe, others showing up as risky and some being extremely dangerous as well as "you're kidding" zones.

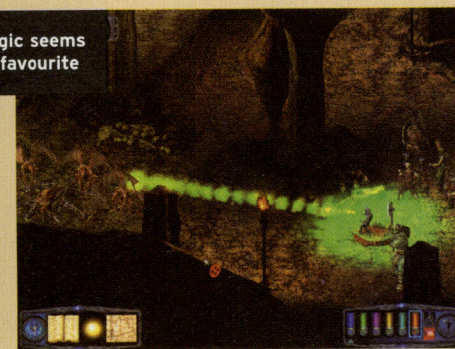
Ruins of Myth Drannor also ships with a random dungeon generator.

"The random dungeon areas are strictly for multiplayer," Yager says.

"These dungeons will help to provide areas for players to earn even more experience and adventure with friends. There is essentially no story in multiplayer, just an excuse to put your best armour and weapons on and go kick a little butt."

waste an attack smashing their way through, or climbing on things for a height advantage.

The possibilities of this were great; imagine the pen-and-paper style puzzles and strategies it







# NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

Bioware's modern resurrection of a lost treasure could reinvent the roleplaying experience

DEVELOPER	BIOWARE
PUBLISHER	INTERPLAY
DUE	JULY
URL	<a href="http://WWW.NEVERWINTERNIGHTS.COM">WWW.NEVERWINTERNIGHTS.COM</a>

**W**hen I first began playing Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, I used to loathe playing the role of Dungeon Master. In later years, however, I was really attracted by the idea of writing my friends into a fantastic universe with all the problems and politics of the real world. It's for this very reason that BioWare's next title is so exciting: in *Neverwinter Nights* you can be the Dungeon Master.

Like BioWare's best-selling *Baldur's Gate* series, *Neverwinter Nights* is yet another title spawned from the D&D fold. Trent Oster, the game's producer, has been working on the initial game concept since 1997 and has, in the last two years, been accompanied by a full-time development team of over 40 people. Even so, we may have to wait a little longer until we finally get our claws into *Neverwinter Nights*. "You can expect *Neverwinter Nights* to show up on Australian shelves a few weeks after we've made it the best possible game and a truly landmark title," says Oster, very cryptically. For the time being, all the roleplaying aficionados out there will have to keep rolling those twenty-sided die.

D&D fans will be pleased to know that *Neverwinter Nights* has been designed in cooperation with Wizards of the Coast (WotC), the design team behind the latest roleplaying phenomenon - the third edition of D&D. "Our friends at the WotC have been very helpful and supportive throughout *Neverwinter Nights*' development," enthuses Oster. "I think they foresaw both the potential and the limitations of online computer roleplaying, making a concerted effort to facilitate computer adaptations of their rules." Hopefully, the success of the BioWare titles - especially *Neverwinter Nights* - will reward WotC by introducing a horde of new minions to pen and paper roleplaying in return!



## Varied environments

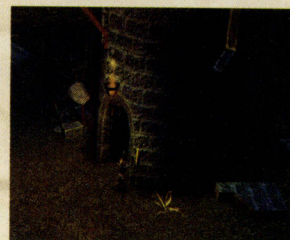
For gamers familiar with either *Baldur's Gate* or TSR's *Forgotten Realms* universe, the *Neverwinter Nights* story takes place on the Sword Coast, between *Neverwinter* and *Luskan*. Unlike many of the roleplaying games we've seen to date, *Neverwinter Nights* gamers will have the opportunity to play in a variety of

environments, including cities, castles, hamlets, forests, dungeons, crypts and vast cavern systems. As expected, these areas will be inhabited by a myriad of monsters including the all-powerful dragons and the ever-present orc.

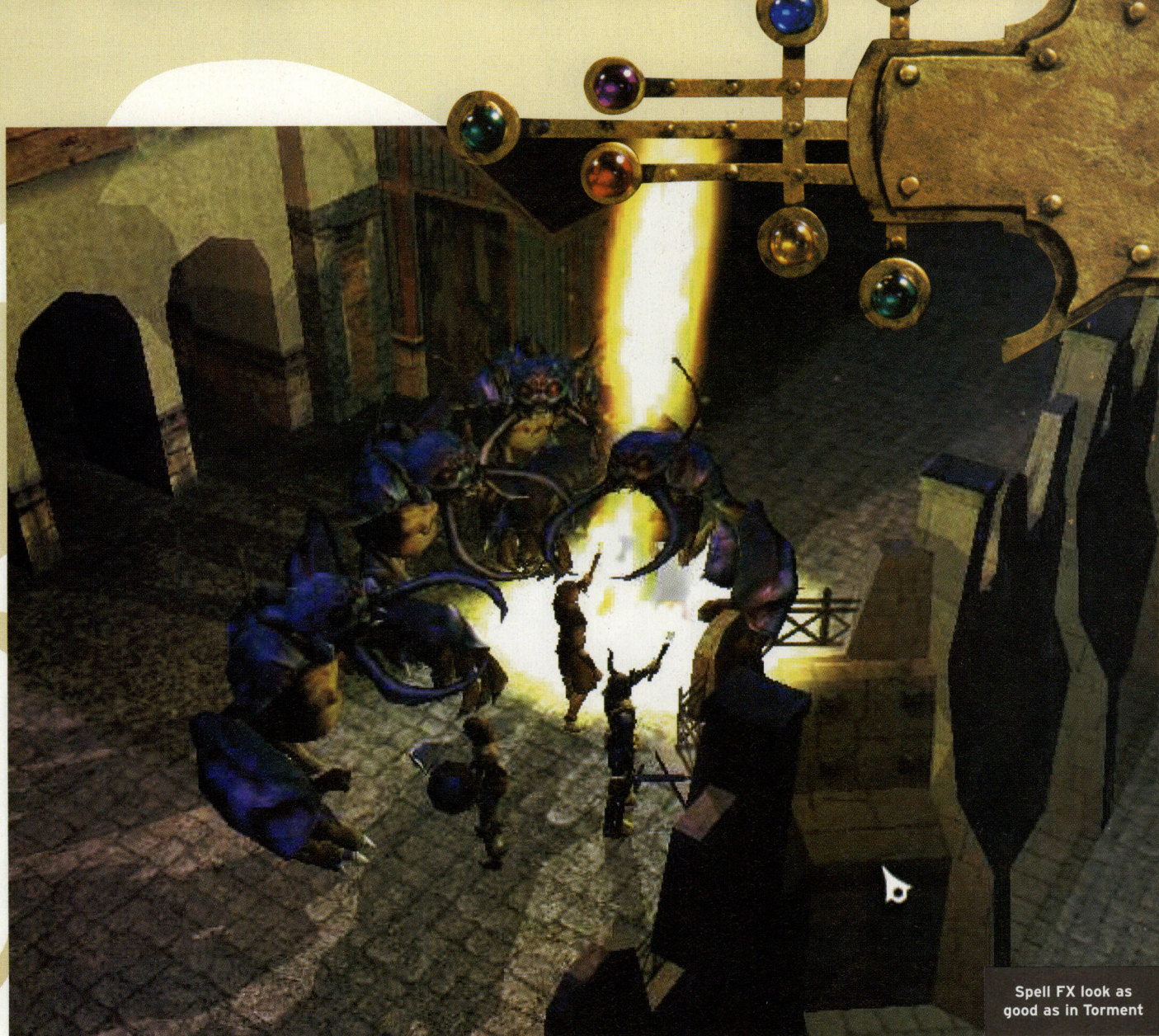
Like the latest instalment of D&D, there will be seven races and eleven character classes to choose from. Any combination will be possible,

## NEVERENDING NEVERWINTER?

For those who think they have been hearing of *Neverwinter Nights* for as long as they can remember, don't be disheartened. There was a MUD game, going by the same name, held on America On-Line (AOL) over a decade ago. The old *Neverwinter Nights* (oNwN) was based on SSI's gold box set developed in the 1980s, which sets the guidelines for the *Neverwinter Nights* roleplaying universe. As you'd expect with roleplaying enthusiasts, a host of guilds and other worlds were developed along the oNwN guidelines until AOL closed down the game. The furor must have been incredible! But these forums have withstood the test of time and have developed modules for the up-and-coming *Neverwinter Nights* in anticipation.



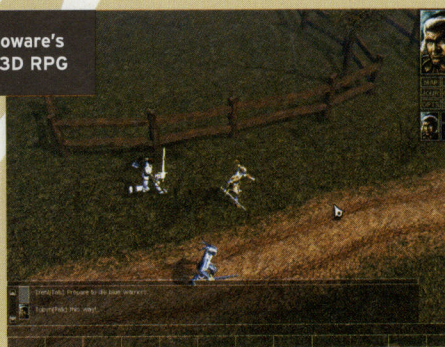




Spell FX look as good as in Torment



NwN is BioWare's first fully 3D RPG



### Rock-solid solo

To date, most of the media has focussed on the multiplayer aspects of Neverwinter Nights, but Oster says that the singleplayer game on its own will easily outshine many of its rivals. "The true strength of Neverwinter Nights lies in the fact that singleplayer and multiplayer are fundamentally the same thing. From the very beginning, we've recognised the needs and validity of both these audiences and we've designed our modules to be fun for both of them. Those looking for a rock-solid, traditional,

but there may be obvious penalties or limitations for some. It would, however, be great to see an halfling barbarian wield a battle-axe. Rumour has it that half-orcs will even make an appearance, as will some of the less familiar character classes such as bards, sorcerers and monks.

In the older D&D systems, monks had to fight senior clergy members to progress to new levels - with the new rule systems, this will no longer be a concern. Oster explains: "The new third edition rules of D&D have cleaned up a lot of those messy advancement rules that were present in previous editions of the game. As such, these sorts of things can always be integrated into a story or plot but they won't be inherent within the Neverwinter system."

## THE DM WILL BE ABLE TO TALK DIRECTLY TO THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

As BioWare has tried to remain true to the rules of the third edition of D&D, Neverwinter Nights has picked up a lot of the gameplay diversity usually restricted to the pen-and-paper roleplaying domain. The new combat system is one example: characters now have the ability to parry attacks, disarm opponents and use two weapons at the same time - even aiming a sword at an enemy's head is an option.

singleplayer RPG will be more than happy with the 25-30 modules that make up our official campaign. That's an estimated 80-100 hours of gameplay." Other player-developed modules will eventually be available on the Internet as well.

While Neverwinter Nights will make most singleplayers happy, the RPG multiplaying community is bound to have a field day - some gamers are already bickering about BioWare's





Ankhegs make for a fierce foe



DMs to increase the detail and depth of the user-created modules to allow for a more rewarding gameplay environment. To help, BioWare has created thousands of tiles so gamers can literally 'paint' the grasslands, dungeons, crypts, etc, into their own universe. "We are still looking into a system to support user-created art," says Oster. "Our plan is to not publicly announce anything until either we have a graceful, fully-functional system or we find it impossible to support".

## YOU'LL FIND SERVERS IN PERTH, SYDNEY, BRISBANE OR YOU CAN START YOUR OWN

up-and-coming title in the Ultima Online forums. Neverwinter Nights will give players the opportunity to create, control and guide approximately 63 other gamers through a universe of their own making. Vampire: The Masquerade was one of the first RPGs to introduce the concept to the mainstream market, but Neverwinter Nights is sure leave the Nosferatu quivering in their coffins.

"The folks at Nihilistic did a great job with the resources at their disposal," begins Oster,

"but their editor suite and Dungeon Master client were never intended to be the focus of their game. In contrast, the Solstice Toolset and our DM client have been a major priority for us throughout our development cycle. We also plan to include a tutorial module, so new Dungeon Masters can easily learn the ropes."

The Solstice toolset allows players to generate their own Neverwinter modules and, if they like, distribute them through the Internet. Oster feels that the ease of Solstice will allow

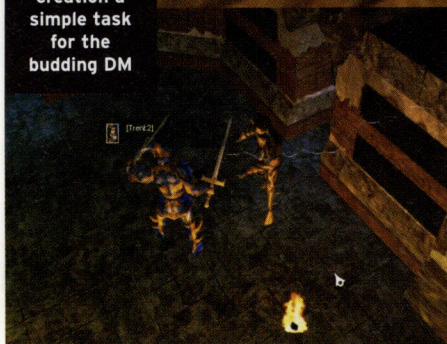
### Make a wish

As Dungeon Master, the player will be able to do almost anything, including possessing non-player characters (NPCs) so they will be able to talk directly to the player characters. Similarly, a DM could incorporate the Wish spell into his/her scenario and determine its effects. "While the Wish spell will not be inherently supported within the Neverwinter framework it does illustrate how an online Dungeon Master can heighten the roleplaying experience," details Oster. "Just as in the pen-and-paper game, the caster can provide the DM with the exact wording of what his/her character is wishing for. The Dungeon Master would then be able to interpret (or misinterpret) the Wish however he/she may like. That sort of flexibility and





The tileset makes world creation a simple task for the budding DM



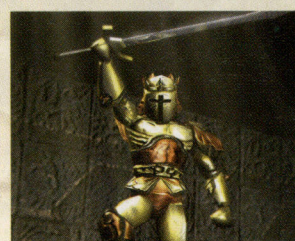
## CREATURES FROM THE CRYPT

To make it easier for Dungeon Masters to screen incoming gamers and disallow cheating players, BioWare has set up a three-tiered 'vault' system with varying levels of security and flexibility. Characters will be stored in one of three areas: on a local computer; in a game server vault; or in the official Neverwinter Nights character vault.

Characters stored on a local computer are more likely to have been doctored than those held elsewhere. Even modified Baldur's Gate characters can be imported, though they may not be allowed in any modules where the DM has spent a considerable time tweaking the interesting dialogue. Of course, if the DM is only after a god-like hack and slash, then...

In a persistent universe, however, DMs may prefer to allow characters held in the game server vault into their scenario. In this way, characters cursed with vampirism or leprosy can be edited directly by the DM or the server operator to help drive the campaign and the roleplaying experience.

The most secure characters are those held within the official Neverwinter Nights vault. As a consequence, these types of characters will be encouraged into the more legal modules. To maintain the validity of these characters, BioWare will check to ensure that the experience levels of the characters are consistent with the amount of playing time. If not, the characters can be edited down accordingly.



customisation is obviously impossible within the framework of a traditional, singleplayer RPG."

To maximise the Dungeon Master's control over the scenario's atmosphere, player-vs-player settings will be included to eke out unwanted players and events. Even damaging your allies with badly aimed Fireballs can be turned on or off at the Dungeon Master's discretion. "At one extreme, it won't be possible to target such spells where another player is standing," Oster explains. "At the other extreme, you can fire away but you had better watch your back because the fighter in the party might want to teach you a targeting lesson with the edge of his blade..."

While it is easy to get excited over the up-and-coming roleplaying titles, the reality of Australian online gaming can dampen even the most avid spirit. Many Australian gamers were

disappointed by the low latency of the WON connection during Vampire: The Masquerade games. Oster thinks this won't be a concern. "That's the wonderful thing about Neverwinter Nights, actually: we're not running the servers - you are. Chances are high that you'll find servers in Perth, Sydney, Brisbane and all the way up the coast to Townsville if you want. Otherwise, you can start your own. It's a great system that should work wonderfully in electronically (or linguistically) isolated locales such as Australia, Europe and Latin America."

You shouldn't need a crystal ball to find the active servers either. Oster says the development of Neverwinter.net, Bioware's integrated matching service is already underway. "We've got a lot of great plans to make Neverwinter.net an efficient and player-friendly place to be. We also hope to

support a number of alternative methods of connecting to a Neverwinter game to accommodate those gaming communities with more specialised needs or preferences."

BioWare determined to make Neverwinter Nights a long-term affair. "We've had a number of brainstorming sessions to identify exciting things we can do to support Neverwinter and its fans after its release," says Oster. "Competitions and ranking systems have both been suggested, as have many other innovative ideas. As we draw closer to the end of our development cycle, we'll be compiling a formal plan for our post-release support efforts in Australia and around the world."

Let's hope Neverwinter Nights is finished soon. At this rate, I'll have lead poisoning soon from moving those little carved miniatures back and forth across the gaming table.





# DIABLO 2

## LORD OF DESTRUCTION

Although not officially D&D, Blizzard has maintained the tradition with its roleplaying series



DEVELOPER BLIZZARD NORTH

PUBLISHER BLIZZARD

DUE JUNE

URL WWW.BLIZZARD.COM



First, there was Diablo and the hundreds of lost jobs, failed marriages and dead pets that followed it. The release of the Hellfire expansion followed, resulting in dead pets becoming rotting corpses and grown adults turning into little more than whimpering, addicted sloths. Then came Diablo II, the game responsible for the sale of more delivery pizzas and cases of Jolt Cola than any other product in recorded history. And now we have Lord of Destruction, the Diablo II expansion pack. If you actually still do have a job, be prepared to call in sick...

Lord of Destruction promises to be an expansion pack in the true sense of the word. Not content to simply tack on a new act, a few characters and a couple of snazzy weapons, Blizzard is intent on expanding the Diablo II experience as a whole, for newcomers and battle veterans alike. First of all, there are the new characters - the Assassin and the Druid - to consider.

The Assassin is (unsurprisingly) a master of martial arts and shadow skills, with the ability to string attacks together to achieve brutal 'finishing moves' a la Mortal Kombat. This certainly sounds

promising, as theoretically it could allow players to experiment with different combination attacks and finishing moves, resulting in a combat experience more diverse than traditionally offered by the click 'n' slash franchise.

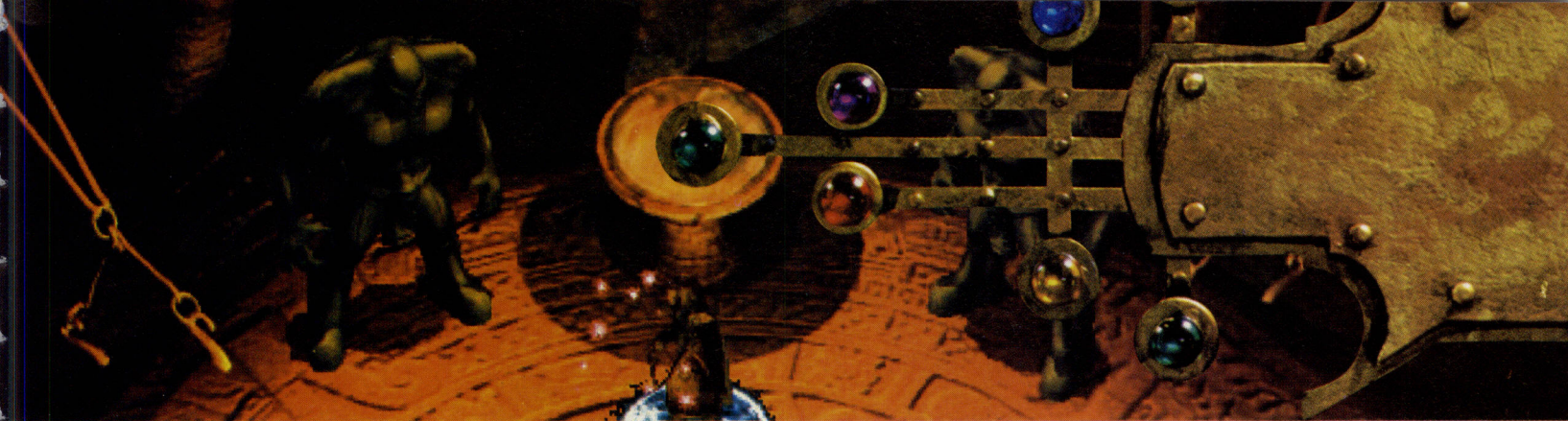
This leaves the Druid, who like a cross between the Sorceress and the Necromancer with a Greenpeace slant. He can cast elemental attacks, summon creatures and basically sounds powerful enough to warrant inspection from even the most jaded Diablo connoisseur.

Two of the big complaints about Diablo II - the tiny item stash and useless hired help - have been happily noticed and remedied by Blizzard North with this release. In the original Diablo II, players were forced to cram all of their goods into a piddly, minute treasure chest in the centre of town or leave their loot in the open and risk having them 'disappear' courtesy of the local peasantry. Now, the same thing

happens except twice the previously available space is on offer. This really is a godsend because there is nothing more annoying than leaving a necessary item in the middle of town and then having it vanish for no particular reason back to the dungeon from whence it came... as happened with this writer and the Horadric Cube. Couple this with the fact that the once ridiculously stupid hired help is now smarter and more powerful, and the concept that is Lord of Destruction becomes more and more appealing.

But really, all of this is superfluous. There are already thousands of you out there drooling over Lord of Destruction and us spilling it further is like expressing a wish to see several members of N'Sync dead - everyone knows it's a good thing already. So with that, there's nothing left to say other than expect to hear the words "Just one more dungeon!" a lot come July.





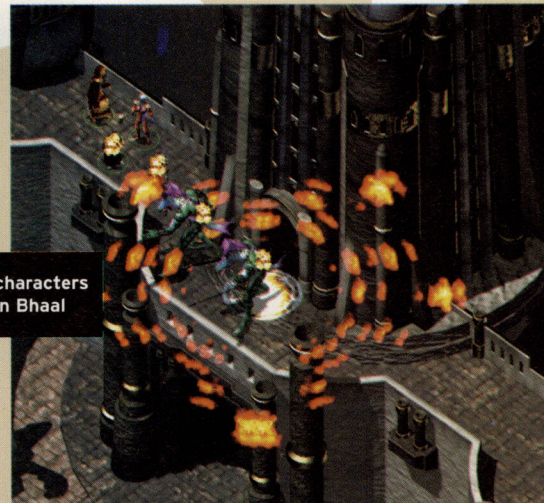
# BALDUR'S GATE 2

## THRONE OF BHAAL

The final 2nd edition D&D title looks set to finish on a spectacular note



High level characters feature in Bhaal



DEVELOPER	BIOWARE
PUBLISHER	INTERPLAY
DUE	JULY
URL	WWW.BLACKISLE.COM

**E**ight million is a big number. Eight million dollars is a lot of money. Eight million monkeys is a lot of monkeys. Eight million unsold copies of *Daikatana*, as Mr Romero would inform you, is a lot of humiliation and scorn. And then there's the eight million experience points that will be available when Bioware unleashes its latest guaranteed super-hit: *Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal*. Needless to say, that's a *lot* of experience to be had.

*Throne of Bhaal* is not a cynical cash-in on the popularity of the Bioware's monster franchise. It is, instead, a culmination of the sprawling *Forgotten Realms* odyssey that is the BG series and promises a well polished, dramatically charged experience where the battles will be big, the stakes high and the feeling intense. It's the title you want and, most importantly, it's a title that has the ever-appreciated spit-shine of a developer who listens to its fans.

How exactly Bioware has heeded the buying public is quite obviously evident in the way they propose to present battles in their latest fantasy

creation. Happily gone are the oft cumbersome and tedious 'walkover' battles of the previous titles, where stupidly clumsy foes made up for their annoyingly apparent deficiencies with sheer numbers. Instead, what we have here are battles where gamers will face off their high-level parties against similarly powerful bands of intelligent, well-rounded adversary characters. 'Characters' is the key word here, as the enemies you'll be facing won't be faceless flayers or vacuous vampires, but rather, well-developed creatures with personalities to match

unpredictable, oft chaotic effects when spellcasting. And while on that topic of characters, remember - eight million. That's the experience point cap for characters right there. This means that, in the relatively short 40 hours of play *Bhaal* offers, you'll be able to get your

## FACE OFF AGAINST POWERFUL BANDS OF INTELLIGENT ADVERSARIES

their prowess. This will not only make for fights more difficult and interesting than most players are used to, but also infuse almost every battle with a dramatic tension usually reserved only for major confrontations. This baby's gonna make you sweat, guaranteed.

Predictably, a new character kit in the form of a 'wild-mage' will be made available for the continuing adventures in the *Forgotten Realms*. Exactly what powers a wild-mage can expect to wield remains a little hazy, but he/she is prone to magical power-surges which can create

characters up to an almost omnipotent 40 levels of experience. Just to drive this point home, here is that number again. Eight bloody million.

But is that big number the only reason to buy this expansion pack? Hell no. In fact, there's so many *other* reasons to be excited that it almost goes beyond purpose talking about them. This is going to be *big*, my friend, and not just for an expansion pack either. It's going to be big in itself and it's going to be big in the *Baldur's Gate* sense of the word. Would you expect anything less?





# GAME DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIA

## PART ONE: THE BIG PICTURE

TIMOTHY C. BEST STRAPS ON HIS AKUBRA AND UNFURLS THE DRIZA-BONE ON A TREK ACROSS OUR SUNBURNT COUNTRY TO DISCOVER WHAT IT'S LIKE TO DEVELOP GAMES IN A NATION FAR BETTER KNOWN FOR NEIGHBOURS, MARSUPIALS AND CROCODILE DUNDEE THAN CRUNCHING KICK-ARSE CODE



I was talking to an Aussie developer who once had the fun of walking into a shop and seeing someone pick up his game and flip the box over in his hands. He waited for a moment, maybe two, and then the kid said, "Oh, it's Australian... it must be crap," before flipping the box back over and casting it back into the rack.

When *Dark Reign* came out Activision logos were plastered all over that sucker but you'd be hard pressed to find an Auran tag anywhere, let alone the little green and gold "Made in Oz" sticker. It's all a matter of perception and it is all changing.

When *Powerslide* came out you could almost smell the red dust on that baby. Mad Max would have been proud. With a distinctive name like *Dreamtime* it was obvious the producers of *Shogun* weren't going to be shy about where they were based. Likewise *Blue Tongue* when its *Starship Troopers* launched late last year.

French publisher Infogrames has bought veteran developer Melbourne House. EA has set up shop in Queensland alongside Pandemic Studios, the maker of *Dark Reign 2*. Former Looking Glass members now feature in the landscape of Australian game development since Irrational Games established a studio in Canberra.

The changes haven't happened over night and our industry is still growing. Come with me now and let's talk to a couple of the most influential game studio heads in the Australian biz, as well as some young guns who know what it's like to start from scratch.

## WHERE THE BIG KIDS PLAY

Our first stop is in beautiful Southport, Queensland. We're here to talk to *Steve Dauterman* of Electronic Arts. His past experience gives him all the cred he needs to be worth lending an ear, and his current position gives him all the muscle he needs to help steer the Aussie industry.

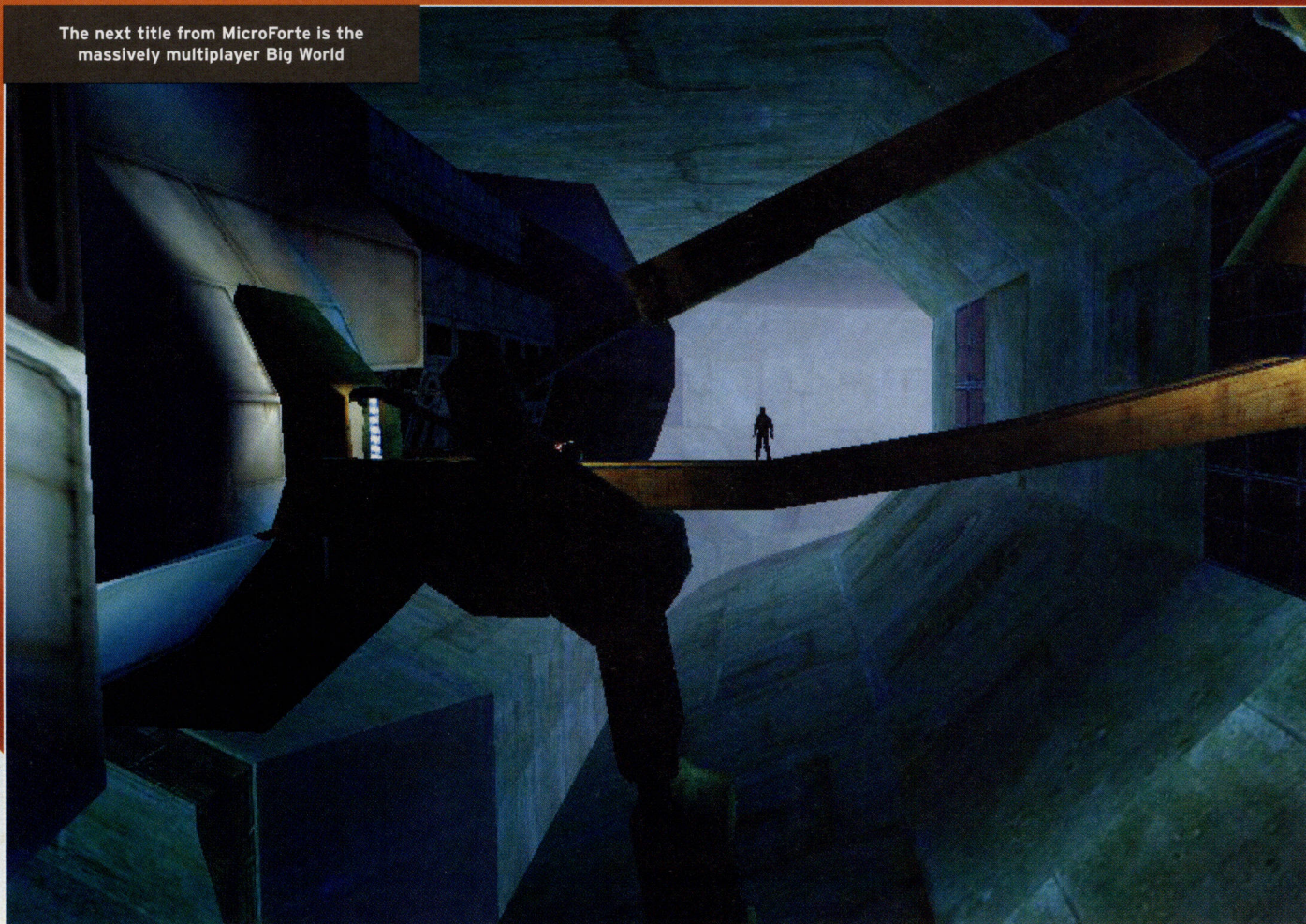
Before coming to work in Australia, Dauterman worked at LucasArts as its financial analyst and director of development. He saw the company grow from 40 to more than 300 people and also managed LucasArts' internal and external technology strategies. Under his watchful eyes such unfairly good titles as the *X-Wing* games, the *Monkey Island* series, *Jedi Knight* and *Grim Fandango* were launched.

Now he is the head of the Asia-Pacific studio of arguably the world's largest computer game developer/publisher, Electronic Arts.

"When I decided to leave LucasArts after ten years, I wanted to pursue something a little bit different both professionally and personally. I had always wanted to live overseas and after making a visit to Australia on a holiday, I decided this would be a great place to live," says Dauterman. The job at EA was just a happy coincidence.

"I was also genuinely interested in the potential down here," he adds. "The first thing I noticed was the enthusiasm that the development community here had for building games. It reminded me of some of the early days at Lucas where people just wanted to have fun and build quality product."

The next title from MicroForte is the massively multiplayer *Big World*





Melbourne's Blue Tongue captured world attention with its adaption of *Starship Troopers*



For Dauterman, the enthusiasm might have been refreshing and Australia a great place to live, but EA hasn't scrambled to the top basing business decisions on thinking, "Gee, it's nice here... can we set up a studio?" It's a money thing and

## GOVERNMENT INTEREST

**PANDEMIC** Andrew Payne

"Well, I'm no expert on what the government is or isn't doing - but we did speak to the state government when we first came back to Brisbane. They contacted us at our hotel (they somehow knew we were in town, spooky!) and arranged a meeting. They were very interested in attracting technology companies to Queensland, and outlined various financial aids the state could provide. Unfortunately for us the benefits are heavily focused on getting the unemployment rate down - so they don't kick in until you reach 40 employees. We had no intentions of growing that large, but it was good to know we were welcome."



Australia is making more sense as a development hub. Given his background as an ex-financial analyst, Dauterman believes there are several factors. One is untapped talent; another is the often-woeful Australian dollar. With it having such a low price compared to the US greenback, it makes game development less expensive than in the established game centres like San Francisco and London. The Queensland government has also been quick to support tech industries.

But as, Dauterman goes on to say, the great thing about software development is that it can happen anywhere with decent computers, an Internet connection, some programming and artistic savvy and a love of computer games.

"Over the past 10 years, Australia is another place in the world that has produced that combination and with the Internet growth the world is just a smaller place now. Having visited different studios around the world who develop software, it is more interesting to see how similar everything is.

"You see the same development issues and problems whether you are in Australia, the US, Japan or

Europe. You see the same problems being faced during design as well as during the development process. I haven't noticed that anything is particularly different here in Oz except that you can somehow sit through a four-day test match in cricket."

If anything, Dauterman says the toughest challenge is finding the talent to build games here, but obviously with a studio that is growing daily he must be managing somehow. One of the people helping to ensure that talented and trained people are available in our land girt by sea is this tour's next stop.

## IF YOU WANT A JOB DONE RIGHT...

When *John De Margheriti* ran into development issues in Australia, he didn't just try work around them, he tried to fix them, even if it meant lifting the industry by its bootstraps.



"I had no choice," he confesses. "I couldn't just do things halfway and still have a functional design house. If MicroForte was to survive we had to deal with the lack of quality developers and the lack of a critical game industry mass in Australia."

Now, lifting an industry by the bootstraps might sound like a big claim, and it is, but few people in the Australian industry have attempted so aggressively and ambitiously as De Margheriti to terraform the development landscape.

As Dauterman points out, world class games need savvy people with a love of games working on them. When De Margheriti started making games here, the Australian industry was pretty much composed of Melbourne House and SSG, two companies who could hardly be categorised as a critical mass of an industry no matter the number or quality of their games.

Instead of looking overseas he determined to set his machinations into action to build something here. "I founded the Academy of Interactive Entertainment initially to serve MicroForte's need to hire some talented 3D artists... nothing like self interest to make one focus," he adds with a smile.

Since then the Academy has become an entity in its own right and De Margheriti had to contend with one Aussie company coming in and scooping up almost a whole year's class a couple of years ago. In subsequent years the Academy has expanded its focus and now also offers a Diploma in Games Development which covers not only 3D art but also the specifics of game programming.

De Margheriti says: "Once Micro Forte's artistic needs were addressed via the Academy in '96, I wanted it to be able to solve the same problem for the Australian games industry as a whole. I realised that just as I had a dream to make my own games company some 20 years ago, others were dreaming the same thing now."

His solution was to turn the academy course into something more ambitious than just a diploma; he wanted a games incubator, where teams were put together to make games during the course.

Wherever he sees an opportunity to get more games-loving propeller heads being seen he jumps in. The Academy not only looks after its interests, but has also helped universities, like Charles Sturt

University, set up courses in Computer Science that specialise in Games Development.

"Universities make graduates.

We incubate

game developers into game companies. It's all about getting publishing contracts - something only experience can teach. It's something we've spent a long time learning how to do and now we're trying to transfer this

knowledge to the next generation of Australian game companies," he explains.

It doesn't end there. The ACT government has put a 17,000 square metre campus at De Margheriti's disposal to build the world's largest computer games incubator and he says that it should keep him busy for "a few years". Hopefully, courses like these and the one offered by QANTUM's Silicon Studios will provide the infrastructure and talent for development in Australia. At the very least they indicate government and educators are starting to see games development as a serious business.

## THE COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Once De Margheriti saw the human components of the equation falling into place there was still the distance from the major development communities to deal with. The answer: try to overcome the Aussie quiet achiever attitude and bring the Australian community together as much as possible.

Now the industry has the Game Developers Association, which De Margheriti founded, with Infogrames Melbourne House's Adam Lancman coming on board as the founding President.

De Margheriti says: "I believe you will find the QLD, NSW and ACT governments stepping to the plate in the near future and supporting their local games companies through the association."

## THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO MAKE SURE THAT PUBLISHERS ARE AWARE OF HOW MANY TALENTED GAME DESIGN HOUSES ARE IN AUSTRALIA

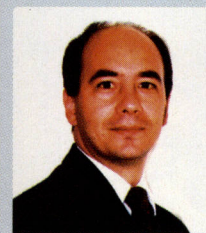
The second project is almost as lofty as the first: "The Australian Game Developers Conference arose because Roger Keating, a co-founder of Strategic Studies Group, and I had some very late night chats, many years ago, about setting something like the US conference up in Australia. A tall order, but I really like challenges like this."

The first AGDC was held in Sydney in 1999, with the second in Melbourne last November. These plans all tie together as De Margheriti points out:

"The important thing at this point is to make sure that publishers (who are mostly in the US and Europe) are aware of how many talented game design houses are in Australia.

"That's ultimately the point behind all of my launches - the Academy trains the next generation of students to insure that the industry stays healthy, the GDAA let's

## THE WISHING WELL



JOHN DE MARGHERITI



STEVE DAUTERMAN

You chuck in your dime, you make a wish. When I asked EA Asia-Pacific General Manager Steve Dauterman, MicroForte's CEO John De Margheriti, Pandemic's Project Lead Andrew Payne and Evolution's CEO Justin Green what they would change if they could magic something about our industry three out of four said they'd zap up a big Australian publisher. That way there would be top brass here on a permanent basis. No more would we have to look to the US or Europe every time they wanted people to be able to actually buy their games or get a start-up started up.

After that, De Margheriti adds he'd look into making investment a more meaningful proposition. "We need a similar structure to the film and animation industry. We need to write off the investment within twelve months and not two years."

Dauterman, the General Manager of a multi-national developer (and more notably, publisher) was the only odd man out, wanting something different: "I would have about 100 more resumes/CVs sitting on my desk of unbelievably talented and motivated people who are ready to build the very best games in the world."

the global industry know that we're a strong group to be recognised and the AGDC gets publishers down here to see everything for themselves."

All of De Margheriti's plans are lofty in scope and many of them are laying a foundation and a structure for a maturing industry. Obviously, America is still the

heartland and probably the most mature industry in the world. Next we check in with an Aussie son who has worked on both sides of the globe to compare and contrast.

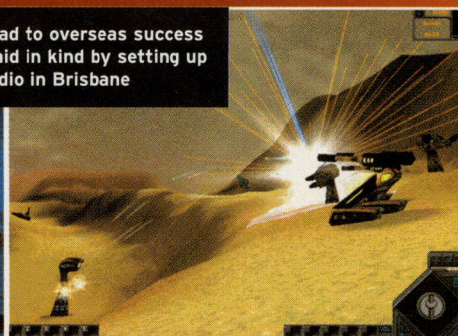
## PANDEMIC GOES PAN PACIFIC

Andrew Payne has racked up some frequent flyer miles. After starting in Oz and working on Auran's Dark Reign he signed on for the sequel (and the trip to the US that it entailed). He's seen the inner workings of a big developer/publisher in the form of Activision as well as working for a small developer after Pandemic splintered off.

Talking to him it would seem that one of the real benefits to be in the middle of a major developing community is that



Auran's *Dark Reign* led to overseas success at Pandemic, who repaid in kind by setting up their own studio in Brisbane



experience that is so valuable to making good games."

Obviously, we are coming along, with the help of initiatives like De Margheriti and the interest of larger studios starting up here like EA. Pandemic managed to fill its twelve start-up positions with experienced people without having to advertise, leaving them only with the distance and "having to machete through miles of red tape" to contend with. Our final stop is another start-up...

you are in the middle of a major developing community. The benefits are greater than just being able to set up an inter-company softball league. Having distance on your side can make all manner of things possible and difficulties solved with a shrug.

"When it came time to incorporate Pentium 3 optimisations, Intel sent out an engineer to work with us for a few months. This in turn led to our involvement with the development of the Intel MRM technology," Payne says.

Likewise when GameSpy wanted to add support to DR2 they just sent an engineer around to chat. In Australia this type of thing proves to be very rare and takes a lot more planning - some things the net can't quite cover.

The size of the community has other effects as well. Although Aussies are renowned for being laidback it seems there is more competition here between companies. In the US, Payne says, people are more relaxed about working in games

and that some Aussie companies seem to take it all so personally.

Payne explains that one of the US guys from Pandemic sees our industry in a slightly different light, "To him, after working in games for many years, our industry seems very close-knit. He's also commented that people here seem a lot more passionate about working in games." Which can't be all bad.

"I think there's a tendency in Australia for people to think that getting a job in games is just too difficult, and so only those who really want it end up finding the companies and putting in the effort required."

Having only people in the industry who really want to be there is one thing, but having such few jobs that people are exploited or burn themselves out is another. A larger industry means more jobs and that encourages better work practices. As Payne says, "When people are treated better they're a lot more likely to stay in the industry and develop the

## ANTIPODEAN EVOLUTION

Evolution is a small studio which sparked to life about eighteen months ago and is working on two very different games, one being Spotswood & Eric for the kids and the highly sci-fi Europa for the more hardcore. Rounding out our look at the industry, we spoke to *Justin Green* to get a ground-eye's view from a company without the benefit of fifteen years of history, huge multinational backing or riding the success of a triple-A title.

It would seem that the problems are the same, just more so when you are a little guy. You look out and see a few oases of developers and then desert. The talent and technology is here, it's just that the decision makers are in the middle of all the action and that happens to be a plane-ride away.

"As far as disadvantages go, the time difference and distance factor is something that publishers need to be reassured won't

## WHICH IS THE BEST STATE TO DEVELOP GAMES IN?

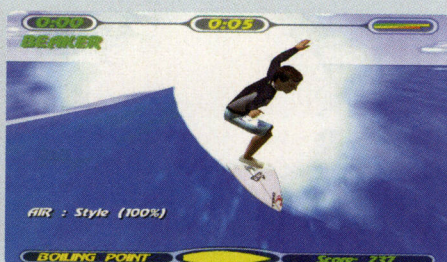
**GREG LANE** Auran CEO

Without having the opportunity to develop in other states, the game development environment can be summed up in Queensland in a few words: weather, beaches, cost of living and relaxed lifestyle. The only drawback? No daylight saving!



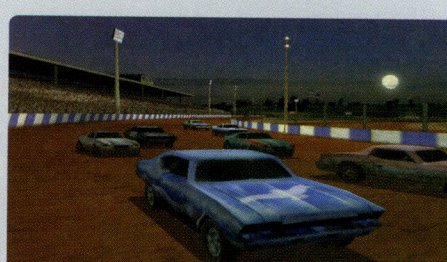
**JOHN PASSFIELD** Krome Studios & GeeWhiz

I'd say California. It's extremely close to all major US publishers and has great weather. But if you are stuck in Australia then it doesn't matter where you are as long as you have got access to a telephone, email and an airport.



**GREG SIEGELE** Ratbag CEO

We are based in Adelaide, which is a great place for us to work from. Rather than get parochial, I would like to go on record as saying that Australia as a whole has great competitive advantages over the US and Europe. And publishers are starting to realise this.





affect your submissions. Apart from that the only other disadvantage is that you usually end up on a plane to Europe or the US just to get in front of people. This may slowly change but it will be a long time, if ever, before we get true publisher representation down under," says Green.

One of the Catch-22 situations that make it so hard to start up here is that you need money for plane tickets (not to mention money so that you have something to show) to impress a publisher because you need money.

"As opposed to the vulture capitalist relationship that many start-ups strike, we were fortunate enough to attract an investor with a long-term interest in building a solid company," explains Green.

"This meant that when patience was required it was usually extended with the understanding that we were going to need to be flexible in our approach to business modelling and strategic direction."

Flexibility is not a new concept but is one worth repeating. When you are not big enough to manufacture solutions like MicroForte, then the best way to deal with obstacles is to adapt. Even with the big boys in the games biz across the ocean, there is still a lot that can be done in Australia. Finding investors domestically to get you going and to pay for those plane tickets is one neat dodge and has the added bonus that you have to have a well thought out business plan and business procedures.

As Payne points out, the Internet might not be the solution to being on the more ocean-y side of the globe, but you can still be flexible enough to make the most of it.

Green says: "The smartest thing I could tell someone in Australia would be to manage their overseas presence via their website. Getting face-to face contact with a publisher is obviously more difficult in Australia, but you can use the web as a very powerful tool.

"The hype associated with a well-timed and impressive web release can generate a lot more interest than the countless times you will contact a publisher only to find they are not yet interested in speaking with you."

A web presence, Green adds, can also pay off when it comes to publicity which comes in handy if you don't have major backing for an expensive ad campaign. If you can catch the notice of some games news websites, you can see them do your work for you when it comes to spreading the word. "Even the biggest sites are hungry for

## THERE'S AN AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY?

Beam (Infogrames Melbourne House) alone has anonymously developed many much-loved classics over the years including: Boulderdash, 720, Battletech, Defender of the Crown, The Last Ninja and Way of the Exploding Fist.

Halloween Harry came out of GeeWhiz. A bunch of Melbourne kids created probably the most popular Quake mod in history in Team Fortress. It lit up servers around the world and influenced any number of FPS games with its intrinsic teampay, realistic objectives and different troop types.

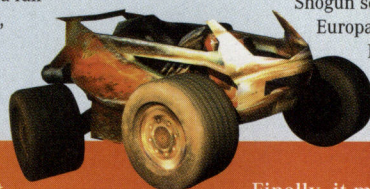
Dark Reign was a huge hit for Auran, being an intelligent RTS game which lead the way in smart troop control and gameplay flexibility.

Ratbag came out of nowhere with Powerslide, a game that used level-of-detail a full year before Messiah came out, and its smooth 60 frames per second, even on modest machines, blew people away.



Now there are many triple-A games being produced on our shores like the ambitious Big World; the

Shogun sequel, Mongol Invasion; Evolution's Europa; Krome's PS2 titles; Auran's Harn; Irrational's Freedom Force; Ratbag's Dirt Track Racing series and many more.



good content, and it is not until you see your work propagating across the web will you realise just how fast information can travel. You have to remember that publishers read new sites as well, and somebody just might pick up on your potential."

## HOW IT COMES OUT IN THE WASH

The scene in Australia is very positive. The low cost of living (and even lower cost of our dollar) makes developing in Australia cheaper than in most major hubs. There are other cheaper places to develop games but few of them have our level of technology, telecommunications and are English speaking. We're close to Asia and we're not seen as peddling American culture quite as much as the Americans, which opens a few more doors.

The games industry is crystallising here as well. Structures are being welded into place. Developers are meeting more often. The state governments are taking the whole thing more seriously as a growth industry which is low resource-sucking, highly exportable and produces a highly skilled workforce. These are all pluses, without getting into less tangible Australian qualities like innovation, individuality, multiculturalism and so on.

As Dauterman says, you can develop games anywhere you have the artist ability, an Internet connection and a love of games. On the other hand, being able to have the chaps from Intel drop off an engineer to sort out your P4 teething problems has to be a bonus.

Finally, it must be nice to be able to pitch your idea to publishers with the dough without getting on a 14-hour plane flight first. Even being able to keep in weekly contact and show them the progress with a beer and build must go a long way in convincing them their money is in good hands.

Australia does have a bright future; it just involves a lot of travelling and being good enough to hold the attention of publishers around the globe, when they have people under their noses selling similar wares. It can be done, and is being done... and every success story is a little different in the individualist-Aussie-battler way we all know and love. Stay tuned and we will bring you some of those stories and show you how companies are managing bend the limelight right around to our side of the globe.





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# YOUR GUIDE TO 2001 AND BEYOND!

## **HYPER»**

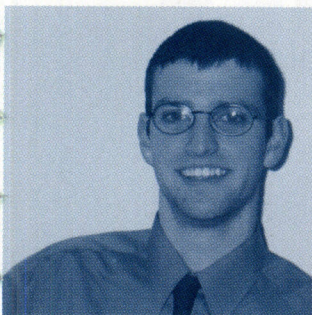
ALL THE GAMES — ALL THE SYSTEMS



# IN REVIEW

The most authoritative reviews around

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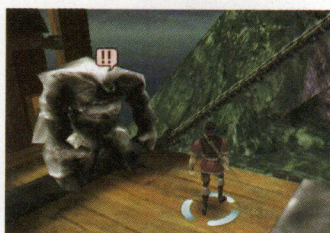
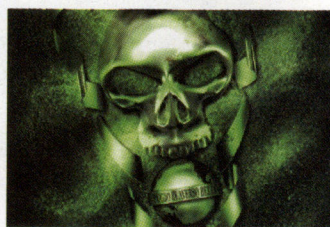
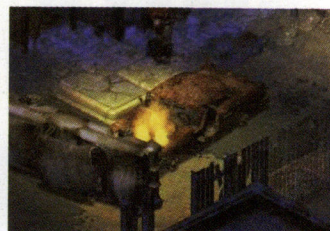
**W**hat is fact in the face of opinion? Just like literature or film, the appeal of a game is less scientific than hardware system specs. So naturally, reviewing hardware is less contentious than reviewing games. But few people love their motherboard.

Games critics do a good deal of loving and hating of games. At PC PowerPlay, we spend considerable time puzzling over the decisions of our industry colleagues and ourselves. Any two experienced reviewers will frequently give the same game markedly different scores. What does that mean? One of them doesn't want to step on any toes? Even games reviewing can be corrupted by "insider trading"? That aside, the quality of a review is judged on what you learn about a game, not just the score given.

In our reviews we promise you personal truth and a whole lot of detail. If we love a game, we score as such. If we hate a game, we write a comedy piece about that game's mother. Either way, sufficient detail is always included to allow you to make up your own mind. But we don't give every game 70%. There are plenty of other magazines and publications where a reviewer can go when the score depends on the distributor and not the product. But not PC PowerPlay.

The truth hurts because the truth is all there is. Here follows 16 pages of the wonderful, awful truth of games as we saw it. With enough detail to make up your mind. Enjoy.

johnd@next.com.au



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## THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.
Need	The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.
Want	The ideal system requirements for the game.
For	The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
Against	The major reasons why you won't.

## GAME OF THE MONTH COMPETITION!

**Microsoft**



Microsoft wants you to play Hostile Waters the way it was meant to be played. As such, we have been supplied with one Intellimouse Optical to give away. Just answer this question for your chance to win!

**WHICH CLASSIC 80S GAME WAS HOSTILE WATERS' OBVIOUS INSPIRATION?**

Write your answer on the back of an envelope, addressed to: **Microsoft Game of the Month, PC PowerPlay**, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern NSW 2016

# PC PowerPlay

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# FALLOUT TACTICS BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL

Synchronised submachine-gunning should be in the next Olympics...

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Microforte/  
14 Degrees East

### PUBLISHER

Interplay

### DISTRIBUTOR

Interplay

### PRICE

\$89.95

### RATING

MA15+

### NEED

PII-300  
64MB RAM  
4MB Videocard

### WANT

PII-400  
128MB RAM  
8MB Videocard

### MULTIPLAYER

1-18 (TCP/IP)

### AVAILABLE

Now

## ONLINE

rpgplanet.com/fallout  
interplay.com/falloutbos  
freelancer.ag.ru  
For all those Fallout  
extras, including  
Fallout Tetris!



**T**hose of you who went to school in the 1980s may remember being taught to 'Duck and Cover' in the event of a nuclear war. Usually, the instruction was accompanied by hordes of screaming kids scuttling under desks, hands over eyes, yelling "Don't look at the blast, don't look at the blast!" Mind you, we were also told to paint our windows white to stop the radiation getting in. Little did they know. No one ever told us what life would be like if we survived...

It is no surprise that Interplay has finally released Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood of Steel (FoT), a tactical combat game that practically discards the roleplaying facets of the former titles in favour of strategy and slaughter. As you would expect, Tactics can be played either alone, over a LAN or on the Internet. Those familiar with Fallout will notice that conversations are now limited to one short sentence - the developers thought complex conversations would detract from the predominant tactical feel of the game.

### Steel yourself

Nevertheless, the singleplayer campaign does have a fantastic storyline, which begins with the Brotherhood of Steel, a group of vault-dwellers who survived the holocaust with all the armour and weaponry of the past. While they initially stayed isolated to maintain their technological advantage, the Brotherhood eventually needed to expand east to increase their dwindling gene pool and depleted food stores. Unfortunately, the colonialists were trapped behind a vast mountain range and were forced to

## GAMESPY ARCADE

For newcomers worried about playing Fallout Tactics online - don't be. With FoT comes a program, GameSpy Arcade, which allows you to hook up to servers around the world with a simple double-click. Once you are in the Fallout Tactics forum, you can elect to play other gamers with relatively low lag times or you simply chat. Best of all, you can even see where each player is gaming from!

associate with the lesser civilians, mutants and ghouls.

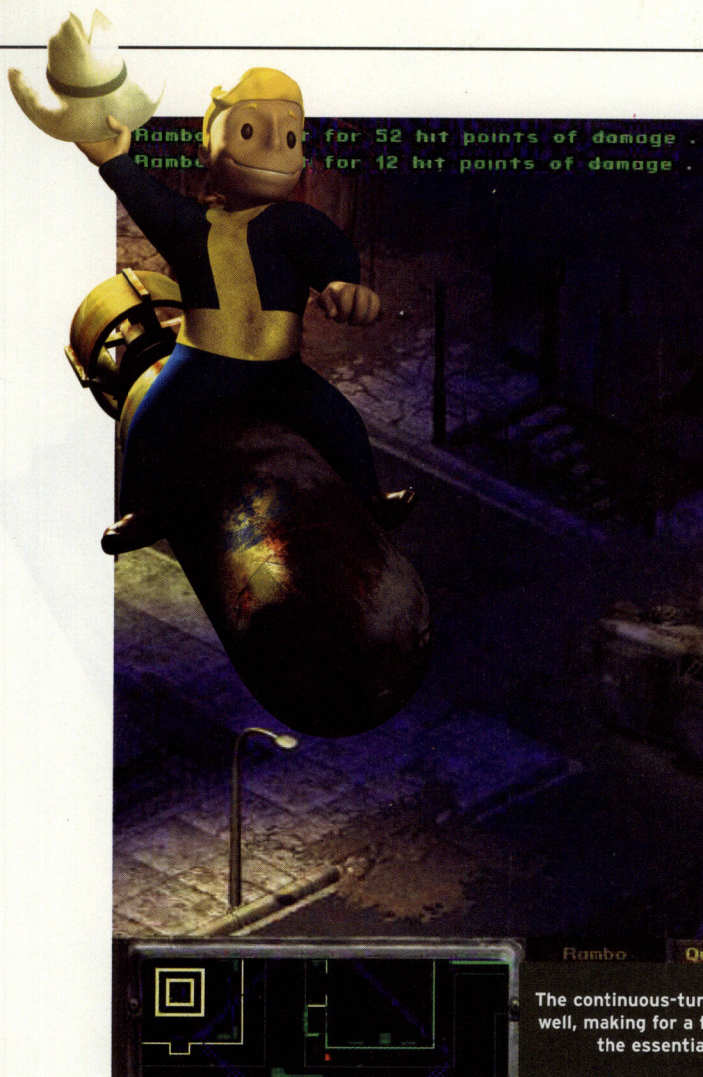
Your character, an initiate in the Brotherhood of Steel, is created in a manner almost identical to the other Fallout titles by allocating extra points towards a variety of attributes and skills. Although most of the attributes and skills are similar to Fallout, the Speech skill has been removed given the lack of general chit-chat.

During the first mission (there are twenty in all), two squad members (a sniper and a field medic), are added to your team, each of whom can be controlled as a single character. Being the primary combatant, it makes sense to allocate your character more points on skills at the 'harder' end of the spectrum, namely Small Arms and Sneaking. Outdoorsman might be handy too - if only to avoid the constant barrage of 'random' encounters while crossing the Wastelands. Wouldn't be too bad if it wasn't for the waste of ammo...

most of the Fallout community loves the big guns and blood splatters

Interplay seems to have some idea. Since 1997, Interplay has released Fallout and Fallout 2, two RPGs that focused on characters forced to leave their tribes and journey into the Wastelands. For singleplayer gaming, the Fallout titles were unparalleled. The roleplaying elements were intricate with massive dialogue trees, but it was the combat system that certainly rocked the gaming world.





## THE FALLOUT PROGRESSION

The release of *Fallout Tactics* was by no means a surprise - the *Fallout* games have been steadily increasing the involvement of the central character's posse. In *Fallout 1*, your followers would do what they liked - the most you could do with them was trade. *Fallout 2* improved upon the first, allowing you to give your followers drugs, weapons and stim packs which they could use during battle if needed. *Fallout Tactics* was logically the next step.



The continuous-turn-based combat works well, making for a fast game that retains the essential tactical depth

### Flanking positions

While initially frustrating, *Fallout Tactics* becomes incredibly addictive as the game progresses. You are forced to plan out almost every move, much like in *Jagged Alliance* and, to a lesser degree, *Commandos*. Each squad member can stand, crouch or lie prone while in a neutral, defensive or aggressive sentry mode (the latter attacking almost everything in sight). Using these tools, it is possible to distract an entrenched opponent with sniper fire to allow two of your other squad members to crawl up to him from flanking positions. When in position, a change to an aggressive sentry mode will make these two immediately open fire, riddling the enemy with lead.

To avoid battles and general movement becoming extremely time-consuming, Microforte has provided three styles of play: individual turn-based mode, squad turn-based mode and continuous turn-based mode (CTB). The first two styles depend on individual character or squad speeds to determine the order of play. Continuous turn-based mode, however, is almost synonymous with realtime gameplay with one exception - combat costs Action Points and movement doesn't. CTB will not suit everyone but it is a great boon when playing online, allowing fast-paced action-oriented games. The downside is that you do not have as much time for ground-breaking tactical insights.

Tactics aren't generally necessary for online games anyway - at least for the time being.



Most members of the *Fallout* community love the big guns and blood splatters, so if you have time to think about the stealthier forms of carnage creation, consider yourself lucky. Some games last only 45 seconds! The game is best played strategically with an average ping connection. In these games, the tension mounts as the opposing players close for the kill - especially when avoiding sniper-bearing Ghouls and minigun-wielding Super Mutants.

### Corruption

At the time of writing, most online games were hosted in America and ping times averaged 350ms on a 56kbs line. For the most part, the games using CTB were still playable but the individual or squad turn-based games should be given a wide berth in high lag situations. Once *Fallout Tactics* becomes popular in Australia, online skirmishes will be the way to play. With the steady rise of online players, there is no doubt that new multiplayer maps and mods will soon be available.



While *Fallout Tactics* is a remarkable game for both single and multiplayer, there are some bugs that didn't get rectified prior to release. Thankfully few of these affect gameplay. System crashes aren't rare, the storyline gets confused in places and some creatures can get stuck in walls. The biggest issue relates to a corrupted file on Disk 3, a patch of which can be downloaded from any of the major fan sites. Unfortunately, it's 72Mb in size. Which is why we'll include it on next month's coverdisc.

Despite *Fallout Tactics*'s few flaws, the game is fantastic. It is obvious that a lot of effort went into the haunting music, the voice acting, the storyline and the written content. Fans of the series will certainly not find this latest instalment from the *Fallout* fold disappointing, as they are likely to find the strategic elements extremely absorbing. For those wanting a little more guts than glory, however, the multiplayer facets will certainly whet their appetite for destruction.

Ryan Hovingh

PCPP

#### FOR

- Exciting storyline
- Hours of gameplay
- Very addictive

#### AGAINST

- A few bugs - one of which requires a huge 72Mb patch

#### OVERALL

A nice addition to and departure from the *Fallout* series

85%



# HOSTILE WATERS

Come in, this water's fine...

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Rage Software

### PUBLISHER

Rage

### DISTRIBUTOR

Interplay

### PRICE

\$79.95

### RATING

M

### NEED

PII-266  
64MB RAM  
8MB 3D Videocard

### WANT

PII-350  
128MB RAM  
16MB 3D Videocard

### MULTIPLAYER

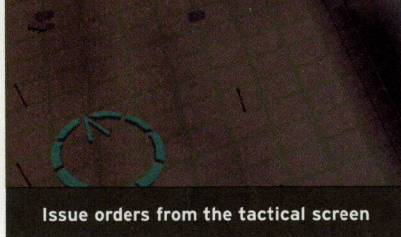
TBA

### AVAILABLE

Now

## ONLINE

[www.rage.co.uk](http://www.rage.co.uk)  
Check out Rage's other various underestimated titles right here!



**I**n the near future, humankind has wiped out pollution and poverty with nanotechnology, atom-sized robots that reassemble matter into any object. But more importantly, society has erased war. Radical and conservative alike, those who opposed this scientific paradise have long since passed on. Now, someone has seized control of many of the world's weapons. Only the newly recovered Antaeus cruiser, still damaged from a decade under the sea, can wage a war on violence.

for the commander who prefers to fight with ice in the heart, not fire in the belly

Hostile Waters has received no heat from the world's gaming press. No buzz about its voice talent, its writer or about its unique gameplay. And that, my friends, is a damn shame because this game is an absolute gem. One of the very few products to force evolution on the interface of the PC game, it also opens the door to some of the hidden greats who have been behind British superiority of genre tales for over a century.



The game itself is closely analogous to Carrier Command. While I'm not personally overly familiar with that title (*It was sheer genius - Retro Ed*), Hostile Waters is nonetheless informed by its use of a variety of units, all commanded by the player from a carrier, in this case the fleet mothership Antaeus. From there, the game becomes of all things a hybrid between action realtime strategy and turn-based wargaming, but not in a fashion that we've ever seen before.

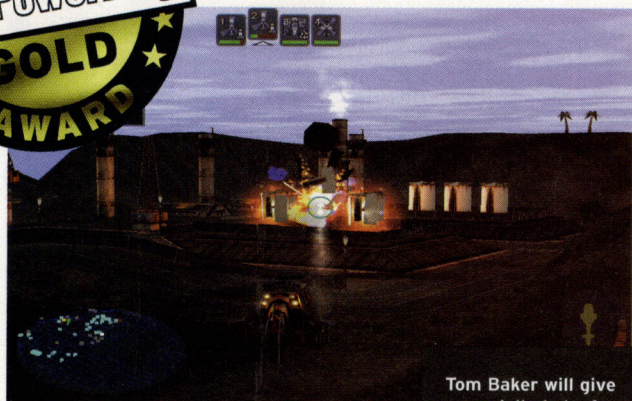
### Abandoned traditions

The realtime component is apparent in the overall flow and function of the gameplay design. Energy must be collected, units must be built and outfitted from a main base and each mission has several goals and objectives

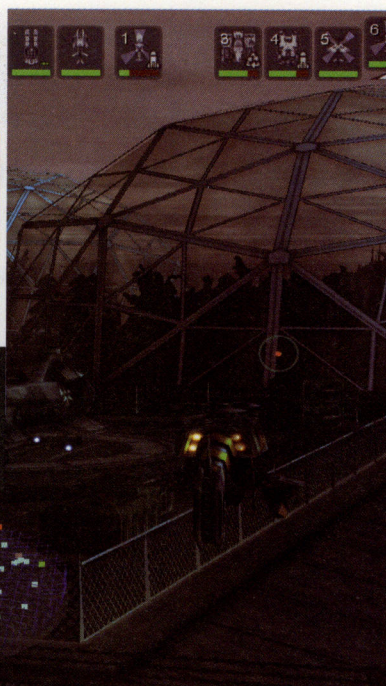
to complete. The Antaeus slowly recovers functions as levels progress and mission objectives gain new tech. But that's just the beginning. Then we leave that tired comparison and move to another form of game entirely.

Each unit is individually controlled. Make a Pegasus helicopter, then once you've custom fit that vehicle, you can take it out and with a keystroke, the command is yours. Then you're operating a fully 3D thirdperson shooter. Vehicles are controlled through a combination of mouse and keyboard command. Piloting both land and air vehicles at first is tricky. One of the simply amazing facets of the game is the physics engine. Land vehicles moving through rugged terrain tip over, spill and react to shockwaves from explosions. It's not hard to control units, simply pleasingly complex.





Tom Baker will give you a jelly baby for that perfectly placed missile strike



## THE GOOD DOCTOR

The voice acting talent features Tom Baker. The fourth and commonly acknowledged best Doctor, he provides the stentorian tones of narrative presence. He is reported to be confident enough in his role that he claimed, "I can make whippet shit sound like the Old Testament." And while I can't swear it, that has to be Paul Darrow, Avon from Blake's Seven, as your immediate commander.



ENERGY: 3624EJ PATTON

Combat, on the other hand, is hard. With a variety of concerns and goals that each require attendance at one time, and one or perhaps two units to complete them with, makes even the simplest mission tactically complex. When the fighting occurs, it's hair-raisingly quick and brutal. Enemies are given enough AI to out-think you and use the same kind of vehicles as you do. Stand and shoot tactics will just see you in blistering crossfires that spell swift incineration. The superior player will duck, weave, bob and pound the hell out of the mouse and keyboard buttons, trying to keep a lock on the bad guys while preventing them doing the same.

Turn based, well... that's a stretch, but there is a sophisticated series of maps that allows for players who like to carefully plot out their games by issuing orders to units to obey autonomically. While perhaps not as much fun as the twitch of in-the-guts fighting, it certainly is worthwhile for the kind of commander who prefers to fight with ice in the heart, not fire in the belly.

### Story craft

Hostile Waters is a graphical delight. The rendering of water stands out particularly, but with typical RageSoftware aplomb there are explosions aplenty, a gorgeous array of landscape tiles and superbly designed units. One of the great joys is strafing enemy ground troops. You know in your heart it's wrong, but they just look delightful when your cannons blow them into identifiable parts.

Right now, I can't think of a single game that's very much at all like Hostile Waters. It's a seamless blend of platforms and genres that benefits from a carefully crafted synergy. In short, it's better than the sum of its parts. It's that damn good.

Personally though, I'm an absolute sucker for a good story. Without strong narrative unity, a game can be the most technically



advanced bit of code that's been beamed down by space gods and I'll still feel something lacking. Thankfully, I don't even have that to gripe about. Most players won't know the name, but one of the talents involved in Hostile Waters is a chap named Warren Ellis. (No, not the one from the Dirty Three.) He's the brains behind some of the most exciting comics around today. He bootstrapped superheroes to the next level with his seminal year long run on Authority. He is creating a science fiction hyper punk political epic with Transmetropolitan and currently provides the genre's most interesting dissection in the post Watchmen Planetary. This, plus the upcoming Ministry of Space mini-series have catapulted him to the top of the game. His comics are a mix of real science, speculation and exaggerated but fascinating dialogue and I recommend them to any mature reader.

It's these skills that add the edge to the game. It's not ore mining you'll need. Scarab units power Creation Engines. Converting matter to energy is visually more pleasing and adds a believable near future hard SF tinge to proceedings. The game's filled with such concepts. Soulcatcher chips that preserve the minds of dead fighters is another nice idea. The dialogue? Well, let's just say the swearing toggle is worthwhile. I mean when was the last time you selected a unit to have it indignantly question you, "What the fuck are you doing?"

Simply put, Hostile Waters is a unique game that's a challenge to your mind and your skills as a gamer. I can't think of anything like it that I've played, nor has the subtle addition factor crept in this hard for a while. Hardcore strategy gamers, you need this game. Action freaks, you won't see a smarter shooter for a long time.

Christian Read

## PCPP

### FOR

- It's all good, baby
- Unique genre blend
- Thinking shooter

### AGAINST

- Not a lot
- Difficult combat?

### OVERALL

Attention readers: please make this the surprise hit of the year

91%



# STAR TREK AWAY TEAM

Via Commandos & X-Com, boldly go where no Trek game has gone before

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Reflexive

### PUBLISHER

Activision

### DISTRIBUTOR

Activision

### PRICE

\$79.95

### RATING

GB+

### NEED

Win95/98/Me

PII-350

32MB RAM

8MB Videocard

### WANT

PIII-600

128MB RAM

32MB Videocard

### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### AVAILABLE

Now

## ONLINE

[www.williamshatner.com](http://www.williamshatner.com)

Everything you probably don't want to know!



## WAR FORECAST: FINE TILL THE WEEKEND

Fog of war is noticeably absent from Away Team. Want to spot your enemies from 200 metres and through a number of solid walls? No probs. While this makes tactical planning easier, it's like cheating.



**S**ome years ago, while working in one of the largest retail chains in the country, my colleagues and I needed a humorous pastime to while away the hours. Customers would be appraised and their personalities, occupations and marital situations were predicted. You see these things can be instantly confirmed by someone's purchases.

So for example, a youngish woman buying a Sea Change video was invariably a single secretary working in North Sydney, desperately seeking an escape from her mundane life. An elderly gent asking about 1940s radio programs was a widower war veteran. Most obvious of all were the Star Trek fans, identifiable on sight. Twitchy,

frantic, paranoid, quick spoken, odd-smelling middle aged men, generally - often with their doppelganger sons in tow. Fighting through rimmed glasses, moustaches and defensive stances, these people could barely verbalise their rage in the face of retail disappointment. I dedicate this review to you, my Federation brothers... Live long and RELAX...

### WARNING: Federation Space

Star Trek games need to be orthodox pictures of the Star Trek universe. As such, this orthodoxy is a few steps higher in importance than say, basic game design, pursuing the latest technology or introducing thrilling plot lines. This has led to the steady diet of mediocre titles that stretches backwards through the

great banquet of PC games. When it comes to games, the Trek credo is 'safe is best'.

This is why Away Team comes as such a surprise. Rather than emulating a popular genre piece with Star Trek characters replacing Gordon Freeman or the Terrans, Reflexive has chosen a very Trekish game medium. Away Team is a squad-based action title, detailing the exploits of a covert infiltration unit. Like the Star Trek we know so well, the thinking takes place (as mission briefings) on board a starship. Then when the tricorders and phasers need brandishing, it's time to beam down to the alien planet or on board the Romulan vessel. Primary objectives: suppress threatening elements, with little to no casualties and a nice moralistic conclusion. This is by far the best setting of Star Trek yet seen, remarkably close to the exploits of our on-screen heroes.

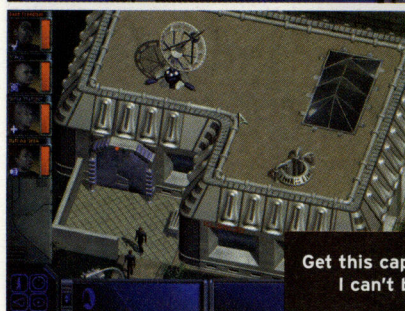
### ...ENGAGE!

Each mission involves navigating through a hostile scenario in X-Com style, with a hand-picked team of Federation officers of varying abilities. Success will bring you closer to the truth in your quest to root out the rogue elements in Starfleet Academy.





Trim your squad mate's hair



Get this caption off me, I can't breathe!



## LINES OF SIGHT, CONES OF SILENCE

Evading detection is a tricky business, especially in the heavily guarded areas the Away Team must bust open. View cones of enemy guards allow you to see what they can see and adjust your plans accordingly. Also, the noise that you make in movement - whether running or crawling - can also be shown on screen. All the better to Nerve Pinch you with, my dear.



When played out, the missions present choices to the player. Softly, softly with cloaking bands and holographic projectors or batten down the hatches with concussion grenades and phaser rifles? A team of scientists, mercenaries or somewhere in between? Away Team offers the chance to grow familiar with some new Star Trek personalities, whilst facing some of the Federation's toughest enemies and allies(!). The opportunities seem endless.

Sadly, the strength of the Star Trek mood is compromised by some poor design choices. Firstly, all of the team members lack personality. Not because they are new characters per se, but mainly due to the fact that there is little opportunity to grow attached to them. Each character's stats have little to no effect on the game, so whether they're grunt or intellect types, you won't remember them. Between missions, team members are healed automatically, meaning your brave engineer who only survived a hazardous mission is quickly forgotten when dropped back amongst the healthy crew of a dozen and a half.

are distinguished in SOME way. This whole lack of involvement with the crew is a great pity. Strong, likeable characters are Star Trek's stock in trade, an avenue which future Trek games need to explore to succeed.

### Warp Speed the hell outta here

Orders and weapon assignments are easily "forgotten" in a most annoying manner amidst of battle. It amounts in the end to a good deal of mouse-clicking and micromanagement. This is exactly the sort of thing that ought to be addressed in a patch, so fingers crossed it happens.

Mission design is solid, with search-and-retrieve or rescue missions dominating, as might be expected of the Federation. Assigning teams for each mission lends some variety, although there isn't much chance of playing missions in VERY different ways. The option to pause at any point and give team orders is sound on the surface, but in practice reduces the difficulty of the game down to virtually zero. In any case, running past guards is as effective as standing and fighting them, so Away Team

collects a bullet in each foot for that combat blunder. Clearly Away Team is not perfect.

Indeed, this review is beginning to read like a trouncing which is frustrating because the game in itself is incredibly enjoyable. Despite the paragraph of abuse slung above, the voice acting and sound are fairly stunning, the setting is compelling, the action is well-paced and the story is enjoyable. Barring a few problems, Away Team would surely be a stunner. Warts and all, it's still a contender for the best Star Trek game yet.

Just like the TV shows, the stereotypical paranoid fan that you'd see at a sci-fi convention will love it because of the wonderful sense of setting. For him, the Star Trek FEELING is paramount. Everyone else will definitely like it but might not stick around. Essentially, Away Team is a great Star Trek game and an above average action game. As the divide between Star Trek and common-or-garden games disappears, preconceptions about these games will too. Away Team is entertaining and good news for the direction of Trekker games to come.

John Dewhurst

## your quest to root out the rogue elements in Starfleet Academy

What you WILL remember is who has which item because you can't exchange items between characters. Actual characters become the guy with the Hyposprays, the sniper woman or the one who makes healing out of plants. This is perhaps a good thing, since otherwise half of these officers wouldn't see the light of day. It's hardly personality, but at least it means characters

PCPP

### FOR

- Wonderful voice
- Super atmosphere

### AGAINST

- Ordinary action
- Lacks personality

### OVERALL

Trek with phasers set to good fun

75%



# AIRFIX DOGFIGHTER

Best indoor fun

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

UDS

### PUBLISHER

EON

### DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

### PRICE

\$49.95

### RATING

G

### NEED

Win9x  
Celeron 500  
16Mb 3D videocard

### WANT

Win98 SE  
Athlon 800  
32Mb GeForce2

### MULTIPLAYER

LAN, TCP/IP

### AVAILABLE

Now

**I**t's a bit of game development zen: come up with a good concept, and the game is already halfway to success. UDS deserves generous ladlings of kudos for nabbing the Airfix licence and building the greatest indoor model dogfighting sim ever.

Starting at an airfield in one of the upstairs bedrooms, choose to play as either the Brits or the Germans, and embark on ten harrowing, by-the-seat-of-one's-pants missions involving everything from the recovery of secret plans to the strafing of enemy industrial facilities (alright, dollhouses) and the rescuing of American wingmen from jamjars.

Airfix Dogfighter has a very respectable 3D engine and plane models look just like model planes. A wide variety of vehicles and planes invite daredevil aerobatics in order to deliver flaming death, and the inclusion of a somewhat unwieldy paintshop allows customisation of any of the dozen or so plane models.

And for once having an Airfix flight model is a good thing. This game can be



played perfectly well with the keyboard, and multiplayer is simply a blast, as opponents chase each other under beds, narrowly miss lamps and chairs, turn off the lights with an artful machine gun volley and generally have a marvellous time.

Airfix Dogfighter has charm, it has wit, it has excellent environments, a classic comic-book story and it's possible to make

an emergency ditch in a fishtank. Sure, it's limited in scope and probably won't hold the attention for more than thirty minutes at a time, but by gosh it's fun.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

### OVERALL

Solvent-sniffing fun for modellers and Red Barons alike

79%

# CRIME CITIES

In the future, no one can see more than thirty metres

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Techland

### PUBLISHER

Eon Digital Ent.

### DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

### PRICE

\$49.95

### RATING

M

### NEED

P-200  
32MB RAM

### WANT

PIII-600  
128MB RAM

### MULTIPLAYER

TCP/IP

### AVAILABLE

Now



**I**rrationally nostalgic game enthusiasts may latch right onto the backstory of Crime Cities. After all, the Pandemia star system, like Australia, was colonised as a penal colony. The scum of the universe, all with nasty British accents, swarm over its three inhabited planets, a thin veneer of civilisation stretched over the irrepressible bushranger spirit.

The game concept also sounds great on paper; mission based dogfighting in flying cars. One tools about in vast urban environments, avoiding cops and gangsters, buying upgrades, wondering what to do now you've been



betrayed, and so forth. A cross between Elite and The Fifth Element, or perhaps Autoduel and Judge Dredd. It's been twelve years since someone did a good PC version of Car Wars, and I for one have been hankering for more.

Problems emerge when the game is played. The three cityscapes you explore are dark. This is well and good for the nocturnal criminal lifestyle, but it brings about navigation issues, assuming you want to avoid crashing into buildings. Car to car combat isn't satisfying, particularly with unguided weapons. And the multiplayer options assume you can convince another that Crime Cities is where it's at.



Blade Runner this isn't

Thus we have an American McGee's Frontier. It's a nice edgy concept, technically decent, not too system hungry, and you control a flying car with guns on it. But it just doesn't work. Crime Cities is another smouldering wreck on the road to Elite 4, whenever that's coming out.

James Cottee

PCPP

### OVERALL

Playing this game may result in dire disappointment...

52%



# THE SIMS HOUSE PARTY

The Sims makes *you* 85% more attractive to the opposite sex

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Maxis

### PUBLISHER

Electronics Arts

### DISTRIBUTOR

Electronics Arts

### PRICE

\$39.95

### RATING

M15+

### NEED

PII-350  
64MB RAM  
The Sims

### WANT

PIII-450  
128MB RAM  
TBA

### MULTIPLAYER

No

### AVAILABLE

Now

## ONLINE

[www.TheSims.com](http://www.TheSims.com)  
This one's actually interesting



## OPEN THE TRUNK!

The costume trunk is the ideal way to make sure all your guests are dressed to perfection. With a trunk set up in your room de party, all of your guests can get changed then and there!



Who doesn't want to see the Newbies freestylin'?



**T**he Sims, a year old title, is the best-selling full-priced game on the market. Does anyone find this hard to believe? Well, I do. It's not your average game now, is it? There are no easily defined rewards, it's entirely open-ended and most strange of all, it's a simulation of real life. If I want to watch people walk around a house. Web cam is a wonderful thing...

I don't want to sound nasty about this at all, but it seems in my experience that a good deal of the people playing The Sims are female. Logical conclusion: do female gamers prefer games that don't promote violence? That offer freedom over perceived rewards? A palate rather than a palate knife? Please send correspondence to yours truly; I'll pass to Anthony the minute they arrive...

The focus of this second expansion pack, The Sims: House Party, is entertaining.

Attracting masses of Sims to your joint for that slammin' hood party was never an easy thing - now it is. House Party offers you the scenery and items to create the party of your dreams. The first is a beach luau complete with burning lamps, a campfire, even a shower from Gilligan's Island. The second is a rip-roaring country hoedown - don't fret, there's plenty of stained wood to go on *all* the walls - and hay too. Lastly, you can set up your own 'rave' (whatever that means), where no one is taking anything but panadol... I mean really.



You can bring the house down from the dancing cage, as the DJ (but not MC, boo hoo) or just as a cute wallflower. Golly, the dancing and DJing are positively hilarious.

## We Are Fa-Ma-Lee

There are some new scenery and furniture items that emphasise the communal aspect of house party. The four-seater bubble-blowing hookah and the eight-seater campfire help to create that party atmosphere. There's plenty of character to explore in this new Sims chapter and doubtless thousands will. House Party offers some great ways to up your relationship quotient in the game, which can aid in getting those elusive later promotions. Like all good expansion packs, House Party complements the original.

House Party doesn't change the basic experience, but it will give The Sims some new life. Naturally, as a Maxis product, it goes highly recommended for the Sims fan. Everyone else can move along. Or you could just try the original and see what you're missing.

John Dewhurst

## PCPP

### OVERALL

Another good expansion of a classic sim game

80%

## The Angry Mob is Moving in...

The point is finally there's a game that can truly claim universal appeal. Sure there are women playing this game but there's a hell of a lot of guys playing it too. And more power to them because there is something about this game that is mesmerising. It might start with, "let's just put a TV in this room over here" but twelve months later the gaming world is still watching while grown Sims have hissy fits and go potty.



# MISSION HUMANITY

Where sprites go to die

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Techland

### PUBLISHER

EON

### DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

### PRICE

\$49.95

### RATING

G

### NEED

Win9x  
PII-350  
32Mb RAM

### WANT

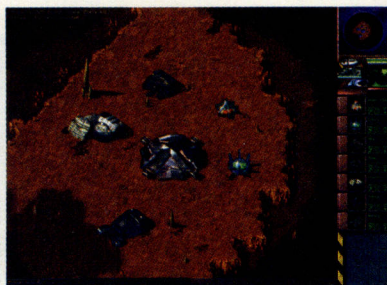
Win98 SE  
Duron 700  
64Mb RAM

### MULTIPLAYER

No

### AVAILABLE

Now



The brownest  
game ever!

**I**t takes a special kind of something to outdo Bass Avenger, but Mission Humanity has that certain something. If your idea of fun involves battling against a mean interface while incomprehensible pink things lisp at you and shoot red jellybabies, if fun for you means standing around in a loose group firing pop-guns at blobs in a vain hope to come to some kind of vague conclusion, if stimulation for you can be found by staring at a blank screen while spheres rotate and go bing, then for you - and only for you - Mission Humanity will be game of the year.

If having a wraparound playfield sounds cool, if having to load up your mothership with resources before moving on to the next mission sounds fresh and different, if only having to choose between three different types of unit seems to you like it takes the pain out of tactical thought, if having no idea what the hell you are or what the hell you're doing sounds fabulously zen, then for you - and only for you - Mission Humanity will indeed be the game of the year.

If sound effects seem only an unnecessary burden on your processor, if good graphics equal a lack of gameplay depth, if manuals,

tutorials, instructions or even intuitive tasks are for dummies, if experiencing a sensation of 'fun' while playing is only for kids, and if bashing your head in a tray full of glass, rusty nails and used syringes while your arse is on fire, gets you off, then for you - Mission Humanity is nothing short of the greatest game ever.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

### OVERALL

Buy this and your family will disown you

7%

# NICKTOONS RACING

Meet the Angry Beavers

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Software Creations Gp

### PUBLISHER

Hasbro Interactive

### DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

### PRICE

\$59.95

### RATING

G

### NEED

Win95/98  
PII-300, 32MB RAM  
50MB HDD  
4MB Videocard (D3D)

### WANT

PIII-450  
64MB RAM  
16MB Videocard (D3D)

### MULTIPLAYER

1-2 (split screen)

### AVAILABLE

Now

**C**hildren's games garner the general disdain of our fickle community. The reason could be that between the counting-to-10 games and Quake III, there is consistently nothing of note. Suitable children's games are often just the "adult" games without the offensive content to warrant a mature rating. Par for the industry really, but what do the kids who don't want to play an assassin do?

They play NickToons Racing, that's what. Featuring the favourite ABC afternoon and Nickelodeon cartoon characters, this light-hearted racer offers some pacey fun with some recognisable faces at the wheel. The Angry Beavers, CatDog, (Hey!) Arnold and Helga and, most importantly, the Rugrats are just some of the smiling, happy faces without a sharp implement in sight. With comical "weapons" such as bubbles, talcum powder and garbage cans, this style of battle racing is good-natured and genuinely funny.

The championship mode forms the backbone of Nicktoons Racing, while free race, time trials - the usual suspects, balance out the experience. The three cups feature 4 themed races, with suitably twisting and turning racing reminiscent of MarioKart and Pod Racer. The

tracks are varied and interesting enough to satisfy the average 10 year old indefinitely. Well, for three weeks at least.

Multiplayer amounts to a split-screen race option which makes sense for the young, online gaming uninitiated. Brothers and sisters have historically duelled in this way. If you think it sounds tedious -

it was enough to inspire some spirited competition in the editorial team of this very magazine. That's good enough for me. A very strong children's game and a PC example of a commonly console experience.

John Dewhurst



PCPP

### OVERALL

Highly kosher, great racing for the younger racer

71%



# ULTIMA ONLINE THIRD DAWN

Is this an adequate substitute for Ultima Online 2?

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Origin

### PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

### DISTRIBUTOR

Electronic Arts

### PRICE

\$39.95

### RATING

MA15+

### NEED

PII-266  
64MB RAM  
715MB HDD  
8MB 3D Videocard  
Internet

### WANT

PIII  
128MB RAM  
16MB Videocard

### MULTIPLAYER

Only (1-5000 per shard)

### AVAILABLE

Now

## ONLINE

[uovault.ign.com/](http://uovault.ign.com/)  
Yep, the source for all things Ultima Online is still around

[uo.stratics.com/](http://uo.stratics.com/)  
Another mainstay in the UO community

## PCPP

### OVERALL

Much needed facelift for a saggy old dame

66%



## THIRD DAWNMENSION

Not content with just giving us fully rotatable characters and sexy spell effects,

Origin has provided a new toy for us to play with in this new 3D edition of the aged 2D behemoth - the zoom function! Allowing players to zoom in on their characters to get a closer look at the, er, action. Unfortunately, non-3D game items become horribly pixelated at closer view levels, giving the overall frame a rather disconcerting. Utterly useless, but a neat touch nonetheless if you are easily amused.



**A**fter registering a new account for the umpteenth time with Ultima Online (this hack has been flirting with the online take on Britannia - hail Britannia! - since before the fabled beta test), I couldn't help but be perplexed by the rather jovial welcome email from none other than Lord British himself. You see, as my eyes re-checked the signature, I couldn't help but ask: just who is Lord British?

For players of old, the answer's really quite straightforward: it's the pleasantly ambiguous Richard Garriott. The esteemed founder of Origin Systems and the Ultima series even used to prance around online Britannia playing himself (or more specifically - his alter-ego, Lord British) during the pioneering days after UO first launched. As 'the guy wot made the much-loved Ultima series', legions of fans followed in his virtual footsteps hoping to catch a virtual glimpse of the figurehead that would lead them to a promised land of co-operative Ultima style role-playing.

Who is Lord British now? It surely cannot be Garriott, who was ousted from Origin early last year. If not him, then who is leading the UO faithful to the promised land? And what has Ultima Online become anyway?

### Community spirit

Much has changed since Ultima Online was launched during 1998, however progress has been slow and steady. And much has stayed the same. Lag is still crippling, and player-killing is still rife. Origin has though, rather admirably, implemented some sound measures to prevent the harassment of 'young' players and help them ease into UO's many nuances. All in all however, Ultima Online is best described as a massively multiplayer online *community*; a game better suited to those willing to sacrifice much of their time than to lone, casual, gunmen.

The Third Dawn offers a cosmetic update to the last major revision of Ultima Online (Renaissance), as well as a new landmass to explore. Known as Ilshenar, this new land provides new monsters, weapons and armour types to play with. The only thing worth mentioning here about Ilshenar is that Origin will not (for the foreseeable future) allow players to build houses here, meaning a return to areas of UO which haven't been brutally urbanised. Yay for some!

### Liposuction

The cosmetic touch-up to UO has come in the form of a new 3D engine. Characters,

monsters and wearable items (clothes, weapons, etc) are now in 3D. Coming with this is a host of new gesticulatory animations aimed at livening up player interaction (say, wasn't this a big feature planned for the now defunct UO2?), and new spell effects (though these shouldn't cause you to squeal much with delight). While most monsters benefit from the transition to 3D - looking more impressive thanks to greater depth - some look worse. Combine this with the same backgrounds as featured in the first release of UO, and you've got one very odd looking game; a bizarre mix of old and new.

Admittedly a flawed product, the UO development team has been making a concerted effort at improving UO for the 'greater good' (*How virtuous - Ed*). One can only hope that Origin Systems, or EA.COM, or whatever it is these days, has bigger plans for the future of this aged experiment, because Ultima Online is getting old. Very old, indeed.

As it stands UO is a stable social gaming outlet. The Third Dawn update spruces it up a little, yet leaves core aspects to the adventure intact. For better or for worse. As for Lord British? I last saw him drinking tea with the tooth fairy.

March Stepnik



# SUMMONER

Can you summon the courage to save the world?



## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Volition

### PUBLISHER

THQ

### DISTRIBUTOR

THQ

### PRICE

\$89.95

### RATING

GB+

### NEED

Win9x

PII-233

32MB RAM

### WANT

PII-400

64MB RAM

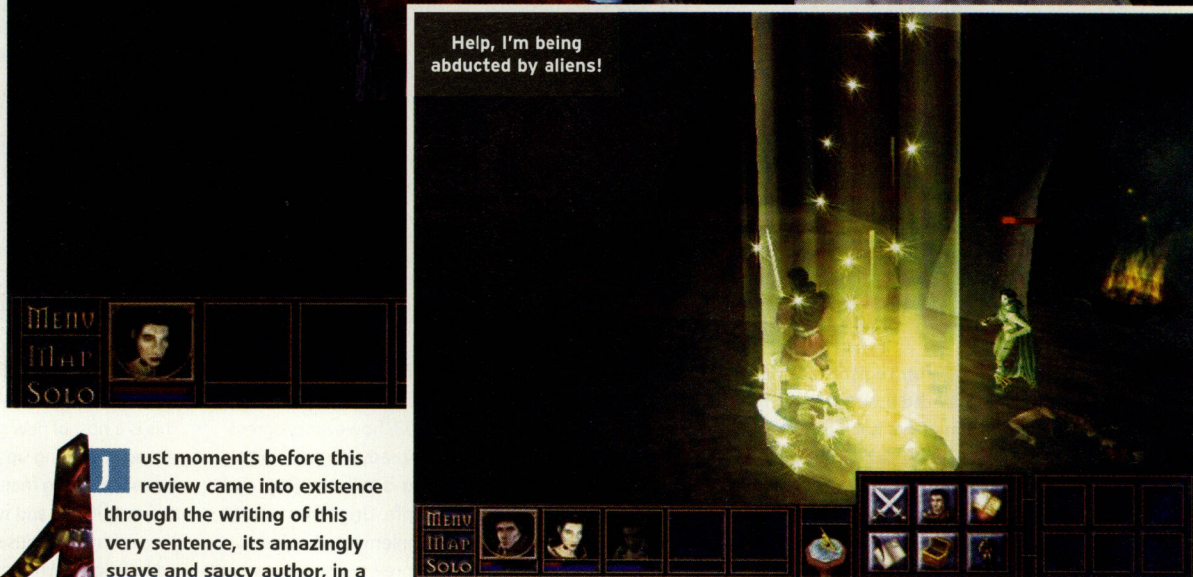
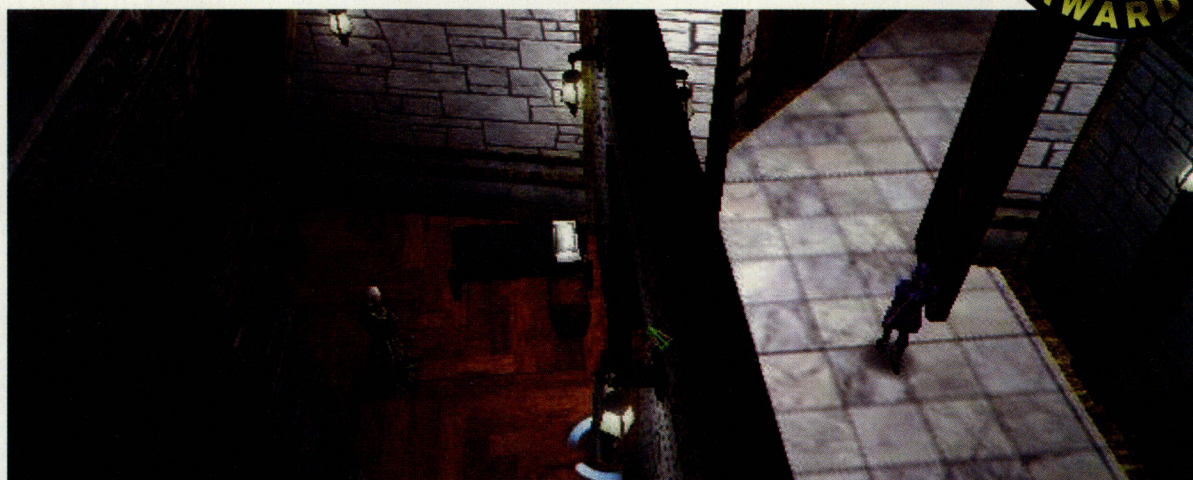
16MB 3D Videocard

### MULTIPLAYER

No

### AVAILABLE

Now



**J**ust moments before this review came into existence through the writing of this very sentence, its amazingly suave and saucy author, in a desperate attempt to find inspiration for an introduction, was reading a very long, verbose article on Quantum Computing. Aside from knowing that just mentioning this fact would add about 30% extra smart to the whole piece, the said scribe also realised that Quantum Computers, if they were ever to evolve from theory into tangible reality, would be pretty powerful stuff to say the least.

They don't exist yet, of course, but just imagine a computer that could process the calculus of a cosmos. After considering that for but a few cursory seconds, one simply can not help but wonder: if we were to give game developers a Quantum Processor, a chip of unimaginable power, do you think it would be possible for them to actually make a thirdperson game without a bloody obtrusive, unstable, annoying, fiddly, profanity-inducing

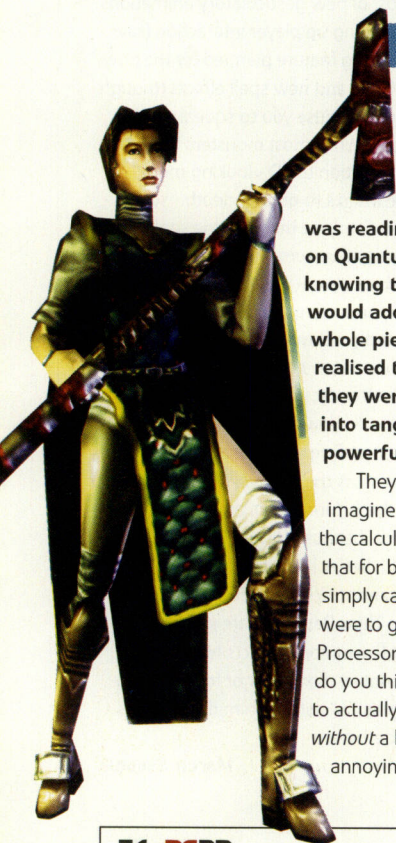
camera? Probably not. But if Volition Software's new thirdperson action RPG corker could talk and, in the off chance, wanted to talk to you, you know what'd it say? "So what? Pansy."

### Sprawling vistas

Don't be offended that I think this game would call you names and disparage the pleasures of your assuredly urbane conversation, it's just that, well, it's royalty. And, like most royalty, it's pompous and has a lot of camera related problems. It hides behind annoyingly opaque buildings; it perches itself at inconvenient angles; it does a whole bunch of stuff that you might expect from a whiskey-sodden cameraman but not from a game. It's the kind of offence that the majority will overlook, but may ruin the game entirely for someone who really hates fiddling with zoom functions all the time. For

the directorially uninclined out there, heed this warning: don't buy Summoner.

However, for those of us with a more Spielbergian slant, this game is indeed royalty. It's royalty because it has all the trappings of a majestic gaming experience - fluidity, aesthetic beauty, intuitiveness and, most of all, *atmosphere*. Walking around the sprawling cobblestone vistas of Volition's fantasy realm, one becomes entirely enraptured by the whole *vibe* of it all. Garishly dressed merchants loudly spruik their respective goods and chattels, daughters dispute with fathers, loafers are forcibly conscripted, monks debate philosophy - it's just so *dynamic*. Unlike Diablo's dark and moody, Planescape's moody and dark, and Baldur's Gate's dark... with some occasional moody for effect, there is no overriding atmospheric effect prevalent in Summoner. Instead, Volition has opted to







## SUMMONING! BAH!

Next to this piece of text you will find a picture of a darkened man emerging from a large cloud of greenish flame and spectacular lighting effects. That, my friends, is summoning in action - the skill that game is named after. Aside from looking very pretty, the actual act itself of summoning a creature to fight with you can have very little influence on the way the game is played and seems somewhat tacked on by Volition. I guess they came up with the name first.



abandon this uniformity for an ever-changing plethora of atmospheric auras that adapt to suit the context of the plot. It is dark, it is moody, it is bright, it is silly - it is all of the above. In fact, the only thing that Summoner *isn't* is boring.

Although this is not to say that Summoner astounds at every step. A mandatory glance at Volition's technical achievements reveals a lot of effort put into making the package suitably gosh-wow in the technical stakes, but whether or not it's entirely successful remains debatable. The audio is undoubtedly fantastic, with the score being of particular brilliance. And the visuals, while excellent,

coupled with an almost surreal holographic sheen that coats everything from wood to stone to metal. To the best of my knowledge, rocks do not consist of obtuse amounts of the colours pink and purple. Until now.

### Into orbit

This is a minor annoyance, however, and if one could somehow put it on a scale and then drop the brilliant Summoner battle system on the other side of that scale, not only would it be outweighed, it is quite conceivable that it would be launched into orbit. Doing battle in Summoner is a pseudo-realtime, turn-based affair where players

inherent in combat. Unlike a lot of other titles in the genre, Summoner's ally AI scripts work to perfection. Words fail me when describing the relief I felt when my healer actually got to healing my party as opposed to, say, attacking the giant monster with her bamboo stick a la BG2. And while we're on that topic of fighting, was it mentioned how fun it is to play a game that combines the battle dynamics of Diablo with that of the Black Isle games, and does it well? No? Well, it has been now. It's a rare thing that fighting is so engaging yet simultaneously so silly and fun, and as the old adage goes: if it's rare, it's probably valuable.

Summoner is gold. Admittedly, it sounds like it's all been done before - great AI, nice looking, immersive atmosphere - and it has. But the thing is, it's rarely done *this well*. Describing why Summoner is so good by pointing out its brilliant component parts is like trying to describe why sunlight feels good on cold skin with the physics of heat and light - it simply does not suffice. It's the dynamic, engaging experience as a *whole* that makes Summoner what it is and it is an experience that you simply can not miss out on.

Daniel Staines

## daughters dispute with fathers, loafers are forcibly conscripted, monks debate philosophy

might leave something to be desired by a discerning taste. Oh, they're good alright, but not exceptionally so and betray the game's PlayStation 2 heritage quite obviously. The PS2 can produce some lovely effects here and there, but an excessive use of fog is not one of them. Especially when it's

have to string together 'chain-attacks' by periodically pressing the right mouse button or by casting crap loads of stock standard spells at enemies. The reasons this works so brilliantly are manifold and subtle, but generally boils down to the great AI that underpins the entire strategic element

# PCPP

### FOR

- Great battles
- Great AI
- Tres atmospheric

### AGAINST

- Shoddy camera
- Glossy graphics

### OVERALL

A masterful RPG  
and undeniable  
gaming royalty

# 90%



# ICEWIND DALE HEART OF WINTER

Put the heater on, please

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Black Isle Studios

### PUBLISHER

Interplay

### DISTRIBUTOR

Interplay

### PRICE

\$49.95

### RATING

M

### NEED

Icewind Dale, PII 233  
32MB RAM  
200MB HDD

### WANT

PIII, 128MB RAM  
3D Video Card  
600MB HDD

### MULTIPLAYER

1-6

### AVAILABLE

Now

**I**cewind Dale: Heart of Winter - just like the Baldur's Gate's add-on, Tales of the Sword Coast - gives players of Icewind Dale the chance to further develop their characters and explore new areas (in this case, the area of the Ten Towns beyond the Spine of the World Mountains).

With HoW, Black Isle has added a whole bunch of welcome technical features, borrowing primarily from those first seen in Baldur's Gate II. This well-rounded expansion features drop-away panels, 800x600 resolution, 3D acceleration, a smarter inventory system (with the inclusion of gem, scroll and potion bags), and a number of other minor touches.

Its heart though, remains unchanged: Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter is a slick and efficient dungeon crawl through some of the most beautiful bowels - in the classic sense - the fantasy world has ever presented. It provides more of the same, at least on par with the adventures had in Icewind Dale.



That said, HoW is to Icewind Dale what BG II: Shadows of Amn was to Baldur's Gate - especially in regards to the features set - with but one conceptual difference: it's not a sequel. It's got a whole lot of new bits and additions; new items, new monsters, new spells, new areas to explore, higher

levels to reach, and of course, a self-contained story that expands upon what was featured in the original game.

Hack'n'slash lovers should be pleased with the new toys on offer. Be aware though - it's more of the same.

**March Stepnik**

**PCPP**

### OVERALL

Black Isle Studios  
Rocks. The Infinity  
engine Rocks. D&D  
Rocks. HoW Rocks

**70%**

# JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Definitely worth the wait

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Sir-Tech

### PUBLISHER

Take 2

### DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of all Games

### PRICE

\$69.95

### RATING

MA15+

### NEED

P-233  
32Mb RAM  
4xCD

### WANT

PII-266  
64MB RAM  
8MB Videocard

### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### AVAILABLE

Now

**T**he Jagged Alliance series is to the game world what Jeff Buckley is to the music world. It has a small but fiercely loyal cult following amongst those who recognise it for what it is: one of the best games of its genre ever made.

Sadly though, like much good music, it has been largely ignored by the mass market. This add-on has taken a long time to find a publisher, with the result that it now looks a bit dated. The original Jagged Alliance 2 was released three years ago.

The player is placed in command of a group of mercenaries whom you hire, equip and train. Each has their own personality and reacts differently to situations and the presence of other characters in your team - some of them just don't get along! The strength of the series lies in its turn-based combat, AI and line of sight rules.

There is a plethora of weapons to choose from, with ten new items for this expansion pack and an equal number of new mercenaries. The storyline takes you back to a banana republic next to Arulco, the area of operations



in JA2, in order to stop a missile launch. This time there are no mines to loot or territory to defend, no militia to train; it's just a straight up incursion.

One great feature is the inclusion of a mission editor allowing fans to make their own adventures. Sir-Tech probably knew it wouldn't be able to make another JA game in a hurry and so left it up to gamers, who

have already leapt to the challenge. A search of the net will reward you with many campaigns and missions designed by fans with many more on the way.

**George Soropos**

**PCPP**

### OVERALL

This is some sexy  
strategy goodness!

**83%**



# JET FIGHTER IV

This one slipped in under the radar

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Mission Studios

### PUBLISHER

Take 2

### DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of all Games

### PRICE

\$69.95

### RATING

G8+

### NEED

PII-300  
64Mb RAM  
4xCD

### WANT

PIII-733  
128Mb RAM  
Joystick

### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### AVAILABLE

Now



**T**he Jetfighter series returns from a long period of detention after a certain incident involving drunken low flying cadets and a few unfortunate Scandinavians caught on the wrong cable car at the wrong time. And makes you wonder why they didn't give it the chair.

The premise, the inspiration for your hot blooded vengeance, is that the good 'ol USA is under attack from a coalition of Russian, Chinese and North Korean forces. The Russians have sent in their mafia squads to take over Las Vegas. The Chinese have unveiled a new Super Carrier capable of threatening US territory and muscling in on the lucrative take-away home delivery market. While the North Koreans have been starving themselves to death in a cunning strategy designed to lull the west into a false sense of security. After which they plan on hurling all their corpses into the ocean in the hope of building a land bridge to Hawaii.

### Old engine

Jet Fighter IV is based on a very old graphics engine. On the good side, it means it runs fast on a modest PC; on the bad side, it means that support for newer joysticks and videocards is a bit dodgy. For example, Microsoft's Force Feedback 2 joystick does not

work well with the game because of its USB interface. Older joysticks are more effective. If you have a newish videocard - a GeForce 2, say, or even a GeForce 256 - you'll find the game locking up constantly, even with older drivers.

In other words, saving the good 'ol USA becomes a chore with the latest technology, but with an older PC those commie bastards are ripe for the plucking. To be honest, it isn't the commie bashing that is most enjoyable

allowing the player to install a massive amount of terrain data, improving the look of the landscape. Sadly, though like every other flight sim before it, the sense of speed when you get low to the ground is still completely lacking. When you're flying at Mach 1.2 at 400 feet it looks as though you're in a sailing boat out on the harbour gently wafting across the terrain. Bollocks.

North Koreans have been starving themselves in a cunning strategy to lull the west into a false sense of security

## PCPP

### OVERALL

A dated concept and poor execution, who cares if America gets invaded?

75%

about this game, it's the fact that it all takes place over US territory, allowing the freedom to level downtown San Francisco, strafe Sacramento and pothole Pennsylvania!

### Low speed

Jet Fighter IV does have a wide variety of mission types, incorporating carrier landings, air superiority and ground support actions and naval warfare. It also comes with a separate high resolution terrain disc

It has been a while since the release of a modern jet fighter sim so flight fans will be excited by any release. Jetfighter IV isn't a bad game, just a bit dated and a bit unstable. Missions Studios is up to the fourth patch for the game, with another on the way to allow selectable loadouts for online play. Future updates may improve graphics and joystick support, so if you're interested the fully patched version may be worth waiting for.

George Soropos



# FATE OF THE DRAGON

Born from an egg on a mountain top...

## DETAILS

**DEVELOPER**  
Overmax Studios

**PUBLISHER**  
Eidos

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Ozisoft

**PRICE**  
\$79.95

**RATING**  
G8+

**NEED**  
PII-300  
32MB RAM  
4MB Videocard

**WANT**  
PIII-450  
64MB RAM  
8MB Videocard

**MULTIPLAYER**  
Yes (1-8)

**AVAILABLE**  
Now



One for those with a natural agrarian inclination, perhaps?



## ONLINE

[members.nbci.com/gargoyelair/torlaugh/monkey.htm](http://members.nbci.com/gargoyelair/torlaugh/monkey.htm)  
Everybody loves Monkey! Brush up on the lyrics!

**E**veryone who went through the Australian school system knows that there are two distinct eras in Chinese history: The early part where Monkey flew around on his pink cloud, and the later part where Mao appeared on the cover of TISM's second album. One of the greatest legends that the Western consumer has never heard of is the Three Kingdoms era, a century of bloodshed between mighty armies vying for total domination of the world's most populous nation.

Fate of the Dragon was programmed entirely in China, ensuring not only a different take on the tired clichés of the industry, but also rock-bottom wages, which must have sat pretty well with cash-strapped Eidos.

Taking command of either the Han, Wei or Wu dynasties, your objective is to make China whole again by managing the minutest details of your economy, and directing the odd military action. While this is a top-down realtime strategy game, there are a number of tweaks to the formula, both overt and subtle, that set it apart from anything that has gone before. One feature that you don't see too often is the fact that the game can be paused, in solo play at least. While the action is frozen you can decide on matters of strategy, tinker with the tax rate,

and toggle any other settings that might otherwise get away from you. A good thing, as there is lots to keep track of.

### I'd like to thank all the little people

The degree to which you must control everything approaches that of games like Settlers. The basic peasant unit, once recruited, can be set to collecting resources, or building structures, and in this respect the game resembles the Warcraft series. Buildings aren't merely built, though; they must be manned. More little men must be churned out to toil in workshops, to sow fields, to feed pigs, cook, and brew precious wine.

Soldiers must be re-supplied in order to stay at maximal fighting strength. This isn't achieved automatically; you have to order your peasants to fan out across the map, supplies in tow, to forward bases you've established. Said bases are a good idea both

tinker with the tax rate and toggle any other settings

for ensuring a steady flow of tax from captured provinces, and keeping back the fog of war. The latter advances with a disquieting celerity, obscuring both explored sections of the greater map and things you'd think you'd keep track of, like your own city walls.

Fate of the Dragon offers complexity. Not the power to finely tune different aspects of your war machine so much as complexity for its own sake. It's a courageous move on behalf of the designers. You don't have to mine for iron in Chess before you can field a pawn. Most of us don't have to kill our food before we eat it. Some of us like to ignore the trees and concentrate on the forest.

James Cottee

## PCPP

**OVERALL**  
Best suited to those who like their RTS action fruit-filled

67%



# THE WARD

Hammer the final nail into the coffin...

## DETAILS

### DEVELOPER

Fragile Bits

### PUBLISHER

Take 2/On Deck

### DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of all Games

### PRICE

\$59.95

### RATING

GB+

### NEED

P-133  
32 MB RAM  
1MB video card

### WANT

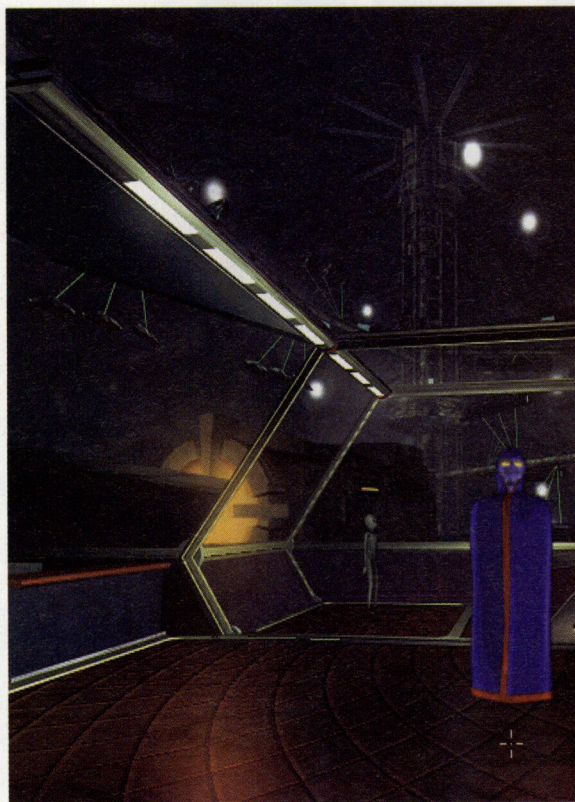
PII-233  
64 MB RAM

### MULTIPLAYER

No

### AVAILABLE

Now



Purple cloak and no face? This is obviously the big bad guy of the tale



## GAMEPLAY BYPASS

Fragile Bits think you won't be able to finish this game without help, so they have included two cheat modes. In easy mode, you can bypass any of the puzzles, although you still have to complete other aspects of the game. In demo mode the game plays itself, from start to finish, while you watch.



## ONLINE

[www.fragilebits.com](http://www.fragilebits.com)  
The official site for both Fragile Bits and The Ward

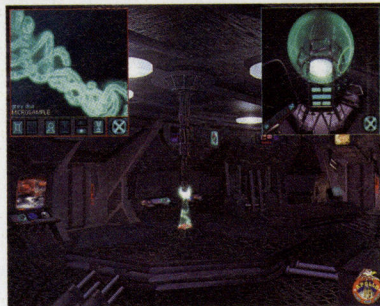
[www.moonmovie.com/](http://www.moonmovie.com/)  
Were the Apollo moon missions a hoax?...

[www.redzero.demon.co.uk/moonhoax/](http://www.redzero.demon.co.uk/moonhoax/)  
...Probably not, according to this site

**A** ccording to developer Fragile Bits, "you are David Walker", an American astronaut abducted by aliens while part of the 1978 Apollo XIX moon mission. Well, it doesn't feel that way. Playing *The Ward*, you get a strong sense that you are... you, clicking away, trying to get some guy in beige overalls to open panels with a screwdriver.

The Ward's plot is interesting, if hardly original. It turns out that skinny, rubbery grey aliens (how novel) have been watching us from the moon. The US government knows all about them; in fact, they've been trading citizens for technology, and having the people replaced with clones. Nobody notices the clones presumably because all the abductees themselves are so devoid of personality. It's very 'destiny of the Universe' type stuff.

However, important aspects of the story are poorly explained, especially in the early part of the game. For instance, at one point your character 'melds' with an ancient alien artifact. Walker looks like he's being thoroughly pounded with lasers, while he is actually contracting something called the 'technovirus'. Frequent cutscenes are used to advance the plot, but are sometimes obscure and need explanation themselves.



## Anachronistic

While the story is intriguing at times, and takes unexpected turns, it's also the source of some terrible bloopers. People conversing with the player drop lots of names, like Howard Stern, ET, and the Chernobyl incident, apparently forgetting that it's 1978. A radio on Mars, supposedly picking up Earth stations, plays dull piano tunes instead of AC/DC or even Little River Band. Spelling errors are frequent. These things give the impression the developer hasn't taken enough care with the product.

The Ward is standard graphical adventure fare. Yet sweeping each location with the mouse pointer and clicking on everything that highlights hardly counts as compelling gaming. At their best, graphical adventures are accessible and intriguing, and at times *The Ward* approaches this end

of the spectrum. At their worst, graphical adventures end up with you systematically trying every item in your inventory on every object on every screen you can get to. Incredibly, the game manual actually suggests this process as a valid method of playing the game! The puzzles are challenging, but come in standard flavours like placing coloured tiles in a pattern and sliding blocks into the right configuration.

## Silent conversation

Don't expect high quality voice acting - in fact, don't expect much voice acting at all. The second part of the game relies on gaining information through conversations with other characters, but the conversations are entirely silent; there is no audio dialogue. This adds up to an appalling lack of atmosphere, especially when compared to the efforts of other recent adventure games. In-game graphics and sound are serviceable, but hardly cutting edge. Rather, they give the appearance of a two or three year old game. The cutscenes are a little better.

The Ward is not used as a vehicle for awful puns and as such has to be counted a novelty amongst graphical adventures. However, it's recommended for dedicated puzzle addicts only.

David Thornby

## PCPP

### OVERALL

*The Ward is interesting, but hardly compelling*

59%



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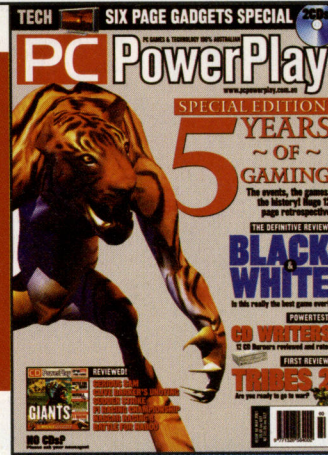
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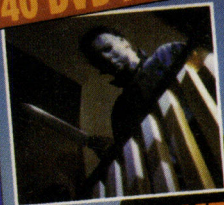
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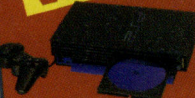
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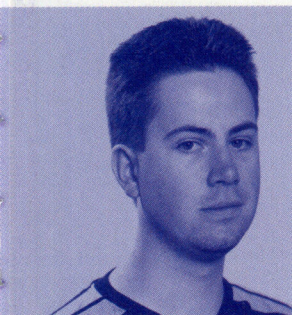
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# IN REVIEW

The silicon state of the art

# TECH



**A** few more tweaks to the tech section this month folks, nothing major, just little refinements. Chief among them of course is the horrific truth of the tragic skiing death of Hugh Norton-Smith, which to be honest is only horrifically true if you replace the word 'tragic' with the word 'extended' and the word 'death' with the word 'holiday'. In any case, Hugh has moved on to bigger, better, and more Euro-centric things. That's right, he's gone back to the Old World, and best of luck to him.

Another minor change needs to be brought to your attention, and that's the abolition of Gold awards in the PowerTest. Now, there will just be Power and Value awards, since we recognise that half of you need the phattest rig no matter what, while the other half simply don't have \$1200 to spend on a videocard. Instead, we're giving Gold awards to hotware, so anything that scores over 90% gets one of these awards to really drive home the point.

Speaking of \$1200 videocards, we finally got a set of official drivers for the Hercules 3D Prophet III, running the GeForce3 GPU, so we're at last able to print some benchmark results. Which brings me at last to the topic of this month's editorial; benchmarks.

Other mags will run all kinds of esoteric benchmarking programs on their review products and then print everything to the third decimal place. Sure, we benchmark everything, but we also use it in a real-world situation. If we review a DVD drive, we watch DVDs on it. If we review a videocard, we play games on it. We feel that an abstract set of numbers isn't really going to tell you that much about what the product is actually like to use.

That said though, for products like the Prophet III, we will publish an easy-to-read graph so you can see how hard this card canes the older generation. But we will just give you the end 3DMark2000 score, not a detailed breakdown of every test that MadOnion's benchmarker ran. That would just be silly.

anthonyf@next.com.au



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## THE PCPP TECH AWARDS SYSTEM



The Power Award is given to the highest performing product in each PowerTest. We don't take into account the cost of the component, or what extra functionality it might have. We just look for raw power.



The Value Award is given in the PowerTest each month to the product that offers the best balance between performance and cost. It also takes into account any extras that come with the product.



In our definitive Hotware reviews, any product deemed revolutionary, of exemplary value, or simply so cool it's a must-have, will receive a score above 90%, and the coveted PC PowerPlay Gold award.

## THE PCPP HOTWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

90+	Excellent, Gold Award. A must buy.
80-89	Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance.
60-79	Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art.
40-59	Mediocre with little to recommend it.
0-39	A dog. Avoid.
Distributor	The local point of contact for the product.
Price	The RRP at the time of going to print.
URL	Where to find further relevant information.



夜

Guitar

5<sup>th</sup>=G 6<sup>th</sup>=D

Hollow tone Normal H-tone Norm.

*pppp cresc. p cresc. poco mf p mp mf*

*poco accel. ♩ = Approximately 63 poco accel.*

6 3 3

*p mf (p) p p*

A-fl.

Very long

dying away naturally

3<sup>rd</sup>

Gt.

♩ = 63

*poco legato sonorous. poco rall. Let vibrate (l.v.)*

3<sup>rd</sup>

*fp mf p*

preferably, 3 strings to be used.

*mp pp pp p*

A-fl.

Norm. H-tone Norm.

*f pp cresc. as much as possible mf*

Harm.

l.v.

3

3

*mf*

damp.

for

5

*p sfp f pp*

rapidly

*molto f*



# Sound Advice

SOUNDCARD POWERTEST BY ANTHONY FORDHAM AND JOHN DEWHURST

Can you hear the drums Fernando? If not you're probably in need of a soundcard. Sure, flashy 3D graphics look good and we'll grant that they add at least something to a game, but it's sound that really rounds out the package.

Imagine Quake3 without sound. Imagine Planescape: Torment without its soundtrack. Imagine Duke Nukem without his witty rejoinders! Take some time to sit back and think of all the good things sound does for a game.

Sound is simply vital to the modern gameplay experience. But how hard core do you need to go? Is simple stereo enough? Or does four channel surround sound more like your cup of acoustical caffeine beverage? Perhaps even your PC has become the entertainment centre of your funky inner city studio loft apartment, so 5.1 surround is *de rigueur*.

Overleaf we've taken a long hard listen to twelve different soundcards available on Australian shelves today. We've rated them based on performance of course, but also on the kind of features they include, everything from optical connectors to Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround.

## HOW WE TESTED

Because there's quite a wide variety of feature sets in this group of cards, we had to devise some tests that would accurately stack them against each other. Fortunately, every card except the Asound Express offered four channel support, so we used the Philips A.3.500 Acoustic Surround System (reviewed on page 99) with its multiple bass and treble settings, and played several games including Quake3, Unreal Tournament, Giants and Serious Sam. This allowed us to give the various audio positioning APIs a good workout, everything from EAX to A3D.

For those soundcards with 5.1 Surround functionality, we used WinDVD2000 to watch American Psycho and Lawrence of Arabia - No prisoners! No prisoners! - all in the name of research of course. We used a set of Boston Acoustics Digital Theater 6000 5.1 channel speakers, testing all inputs, including RCAs, optical digital and also coax.

By using the same speakers and the same PC for each card, we were able to determine which cards gave the best sound, and give our Value and Power awards accordingly.



## DO YOU SPEAK SOUNDCARDESE?

With every great technology comes a bunch of acronyms that mean nothing to most people but from which we are supposed to make some kind of an informed purchasing decision. Here's a few we've used in the following pages.

### A3D

Not the McDonnell-Douglas Skywarrior, but an Application Programming Interface (API) for audio positioning and effects. However, unlike EAX, A3D concentrates on simulating the realistic movement of sound waves. So the sound from an explosion in front of the player will also bounce off a wall behind the player. A3D was developed by Aureal Semiconductors Inc which, sadly, went belly up. Fortunately, A3D technology was purchased by Creative, so expect to see the A3D standard used in many future games.

### EAX

A whole mess of software developed by Creative to turn plain sound into an all-singing all-dancing extravaganza. At its most basic, EAX allows for acoustical variance in different game environments. By which we mean, if you're in a huge cavern, sounds will echo. If you're in a felt-lined chamber, sounds will be deadened. However, EAX is actually a huge set of programming tools that allow developers to do pretty much anything with audio, everything from disguising people's voices in real time to making new Chipmunks albums.

### SENSAURA

Like A3D and EAX, Sensaura is yet another audio positioning and effects technology. Since it does everything EAX 1.0 and A3D 1.0 does but doesn't support the 2.0 iterations of either of these mainstream technologies, Sensaura seems to be falling out of favour somewhat. Game developers are certainly concentrating on A3D and EAX compatibility.

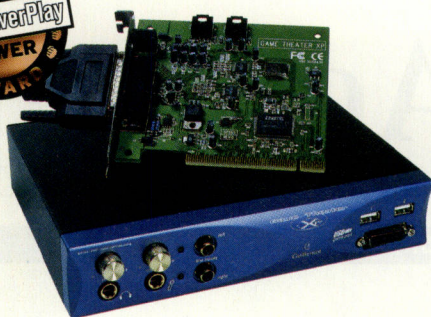
### DOLBY DIGITAL 5.1

This isn't really an acronym, but what the hell. Dolby Labs Inc has been around for quite a while now, and the company enjoys a virtual monopoly in all forms of home theatre audio delivery. Originally heard in 1992 in cinemas with the release of Batman Forever, Dolby Digital further enhances movie audio, with 6 speaker support for front, rear, subwoofer and centre channels. Of course, it's irrelevant for games, but watching a DVD with Dolby 5.1 activated will truly bring home the fact that VHS is dead as a doornail.

### OPTICAL CABLE

Okay so this isn't really an acronym either. An optical cable is a fibre-optic connection between a sound source and a set of speakers. Both devices need to have digital optical out plugs, but this single slim optical cable is much more convenient, tidy, and just as powerful as six metres of triple-plugged RCA connectors. Handle with care though; the fibre optic 'wire' is relatively delicate, and since these babies cost \$30 for 75cm, you don't want to break them too often.

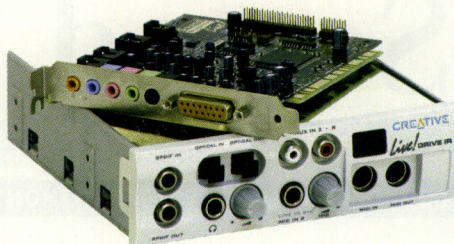




## GAMETHEATER XP

**URL** [www.hercules.com](http://www.hercules.com)

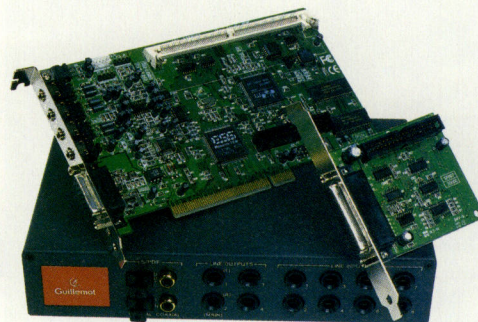
This is a truly complete package at an extremely low price, and after these suite of tests we are confident that the Gametheater XP has finally unseated the Soundblaster Live! Platinum 5.1 from its throne.



## SB LIVE! PLATINUM 5.1

**URL** [www.australia.creative.com](http://www.australia.creative.com)

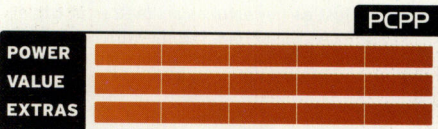
The only real downer with the Platinum is the price. At \$500 it's the second most expensive soundcard in the PowerTest, and with the Gametheater offering everything it does plus USB ports, the Platinum's days as king of the hill are very much numbered.



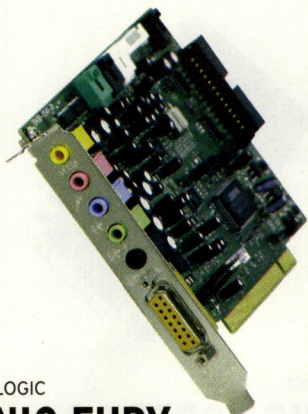
# ISIS

**URL** [www.guillemot.com](http://www.guillemot.com)

This is a card for those who place more emphasis on making and listening to music rather than enjoying environmental audio in games. Full Soundblaster compatibility means it worked with every game we threw at it, but obviously only on the subwoofer and front two speakers of the Philips test system. Bass response was excellent, and this card is clearly a superior 'listening' card to everything else in the PowerTest. But only buy it if you're serious about making music. It's just not a gamer's card.







VIDEOLOGIC

## SONIC FURY

**DISTRIBUTOR** Videologic 1800 067 722

**PRICE** \$295

**URL** www.videologic.com

You may recall the evocatively named Turtle Beach line of soundcards from a couple of years ago, and you may have been wondering what ever happened to these products. It turns out they've been rebadged as Videologic soundcards. Indeed, if you flip the SonicFury you will see Turtle Beach Santa Cruz stencilling on the back of the card; these are exactly the same product.

The SonicFury is aimed squarely at the market niche currently dominated by the SoundBlaster Live! 5.1, being a stand alone card with 5.1 channel support. One interesting feature among the usual set of inputs is VideoLogic's VersaJack. This port functions in several different ways, including stereo in, headphone out, line out for a centre speaker or subwoofer, and as an SPDIF digital output. Quite an amazing little thing, and it saves VideoLogic having to supply a daughterboard for all the extra inputs.

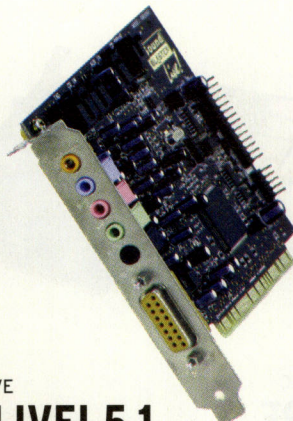
The software bundle supplied with the SonicFury is very extensive, including the funky ACID Xpress loop-based multitrack sequencer, MusicMatch Jukebox, PCDJ Phat and an enormous list of other applications. In this area, the SonicFury seriously canes all the other cards in the PowerTest, although of course it's performance that counts, not software.

When paced against the Soundblaster Live! 5.1 the SonicFury had very similar CPU utilisation, and performance in all basic audio tasks was virtually identical. It's a high-end card and it has high end performance. One disappointment though was the lack of a digital optical output, so no direct digital transfer with your minidisc is possible.

Supporting all major audio positioning APIs, our gaming tests on both the Philips 4 channel speakers and the Boston DT6000 was without fault. The bottom line though is that the SonicFury offers nearly everything the SoundBlaster Live! has and nothing else, making it difficult to see this card as much more than a splash in the Creative ocean.

PCPP

POWER  
VALUE  
EXTRAS



CREATIVE

## SB LIVE! 5.1

**DISTRIBUTOR** Creative Labs 02 9666 6100

**PRICE** \$249

**URL** www.australia.creative.com

The Soundblaster Live! has been the card of choice for gamers for some time now, the reason being it offers excellent solutions for the average PC user's sound needs. Almost every game title released enjoys full Soundblaster support - a testament to the dominance of Creative in the market. Offering full 5.1 surround sound in both Dolby Digital and analog formats, this card is the perfect choice for those who demand premium surround sound for their movie and gaming tastes. The EAX feature creates the illusion of space in games, realistic physical sound which is all important in the surround sound stakes.

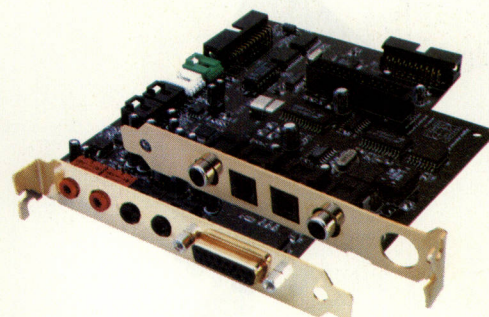
The Live! 5.1 features all of the obligatory plugs while not featuring the superior stereo RCA plugs. The analogue/digital out jack means connection to digital systems and speakers, like Minidisc, DAT via minijack-to-DIN cable. Using the Line out and Rear out jacks, 4.1 and 5.1 surround speaker systems can be set up. This is card particularly useful therefore, in playing DVD movies from your PC. The Line In jack allows connection from your stereo or Minidisc, albeit without the digital input other set ups would feature.

Included software is definitely aimed at the gamers and Thief 2, Deus EX & MDK2 are worthy additions to any library. The standard array of bundled sound programs (including Creative's Playcenter 2 & Recorder) will at least give you somewhere to start, without being significant.

The Soundblaster Live! lacks the wizz-bang features (Live Drive) of the Platinum 5.1, the top of the Creative pile but is otherwise pretty much the same card. Despite the fact that today you're better off instead with our champion, the Hercules Gametheater XP, this card still performs admirably for the significantly cheaper price tag than its Platinum big brother. The Soundblaster Live! 5.1 is a solid card but it's certainly not the pick of the PowerTest.

PCPP

POWER  
VALUE  
EXTRAS



TERRATEC

## DMX

**DISTRIBUTOR** Innovision 03 9817 7988

**PRICE** \$349

**URL** www.terratec.com

Terratec has previously been known for its professional cards, catering for the prosumer market with all sorts of clever digital ins and outs and advanced low bandwidth processing engines and, most importantly, gold plated connectors.

So the company has now moved into the consumer market with two cards, the DMX and the DMX Xfire. The DMX is the flagship gaming card and boasts the kind of functionality found on the SB Live! 5.1 and - discounting the lack of a rack - the Gametheater.

The card comes in two parts; the main card with most of the inputs and outputs, and a daughterboard with optical and coax digital connectors, both in and out. There is also 4 channel support, but no 5.1 Digital decoding unfortunately.

The card supports all the major APIs including A3D 1.0 and 2.0, EAX and even Sensaura. The professional legacy of Terratec is passed down to this card, with very solid construction and the afore mentioned gold connectors which theoretically improve signal quality, although we didn't notice any massive improvements over the SBLive!

Sound output quality was very high indeed in our Quake3 tests. Running through the Philips speakers, this card was a marked improvement over the SBLive! with richer bass and more power. This was the only card apart from the Gametheater that really seemed to respond well with Philips' patented wOOx bass expansion technology.

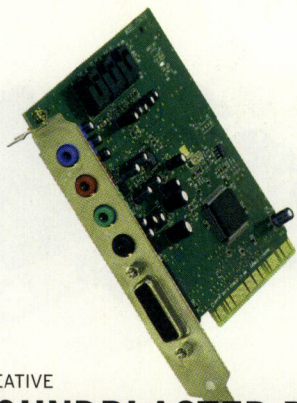
Unlike the SBLive! packs which each have a couple of free games (including Deus Ex) the TerraTec software bundle offers only an MP3 player called Winjelly, a little composer called Buzz, and Mixman Studio ES. For this price, we were expecting a bit more. Because, perhaps due to the professional build quality, the DMX is still \$20 more expensive than the Hercules Gametheater and lacks 5.1 Digital sound, RCA inputs and MP3 hardware acceleration. It's a solid card, but the Gametheater is a more sensible investment, no matter how you look at it.

PCPP

POWER  
VALUE  
EXTRAS







CREATIVE

# SOUNDBLASTER PCI128

**DISTRIBUTOR** Creative Labs 02 9666 6100

**PRICE** \$109

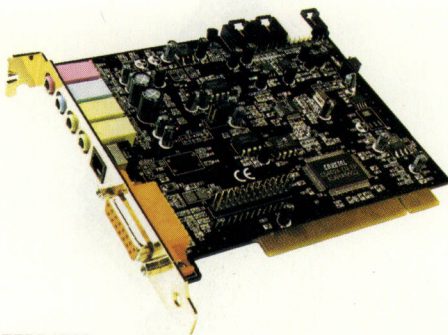
**URL** [www.australia.creative.com](http://www.australia.creative.com)

■ This is the budget card of Creative's range as well as one of the more basic cards in the Powertest. As such, it offers little more than EAX-supported 128 bit sound. That means basic compatibility for 3D sound in your gaming but little else. As in life, you get what you pay for; ergo this card is dirt cheap in the soundcard stakes.

EAX (Environmental Audio Extensions) is fairly old news for soundcards but it has a significant effect on the realism of a gaming experience. Moving around in a small room will sound different to running in a giant boomy warehouse thanks to EAX. It simulates realistic sound phenomenon like Doppler effect and echoes in different environs. Widely supported, this is the basically the selling point of the card - improved realism in the audio experience of games.

You can connect up to 4 speakers for 3D audio in games but Dolby Digital 5.1 sound isn't supported. This card is inferior for DVD movie viewing, a commonplace feature in many current cards, offering only basic stereo sound. Only the absolute basics of software were provided. The obligatory drivers and basic sound tools are included together with just one game (Need for Speed High Stakes). Rather disappointing that more titles weren't bundled to sweeten the deal but that's basic soundcards for you.

While certainly no threat to the current selection of soundcards on the market, the PCI 128 does what it does well. The (at one time high-quality) 16 bit digital-to-analogue converters create a good quality of sound and the EAX works wonders in the action gaming arena. But this is a gaming card only. A definite audio option, if funds are highly restricted and if 5.1 surround or digital In/Out are not a concern, although the MUSE offers more for a lower price. However, users who demand more grunt and greater versatility should look to the other bigger contenders.



TERRATEC

# XFIRE

**DISTRIBUTOR** Innovision 03 9817 7988

**PRICE** \$189

**URL** [www.terratec.com](http://www.terratec.com)

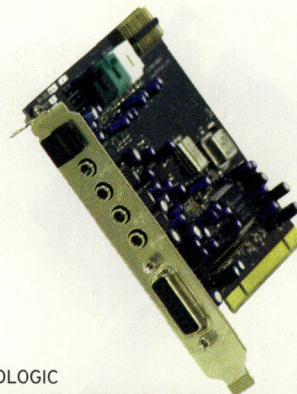
It's a dangerously homogenous zone, the mid-range soundcard market, where everyone looks like everyone else and it seems the only way to stand out from the crowd is to have some amazing extra feature which nobody else has yet still maintain a similar price point.

The Terratec DMX Xfire - which we pronounce as 'crossfire' folks - doesn't immediately stand up and shout "look at me!" aside from its being tricked out in a very sexy black. We know you all like to write in and say PCB colour doesn't matter, but both the Terratec cards in the PowerTest are very well built with gold connectors and clear labelling.

It's actually necessary to look twice at the Xfire when it's stacked next to the Videologic Sonic Vortex 2 as these cards are very similar. Like the Videologic card, the Xfire supports four channels of audio with stereo jacks for front and rear speaker sets. Also, an optical out is provided although Terratec doesn't include an optical cable in the package. And there are audio connectors for two CD-ROMs so you can indeed listen to Michael Jackson sing along with Eminem.

The Xfire supports EAX both 1.0 and 2.0 so ambient effects and environmental acoustics are recreated admirably. Being a four channel card, we could only test it on the Philips speakers, and the output was suitably pumpin' with lots of chunky bass and clear recreation of treble. And the card worked very well in all our game tests with the Quake3 surround effects sounding very good indeed.

This is a very solid card and installation was quick and painless. For those who have had a bad experience with Creative Soundblasters (not that we are suggesting anyone has necessarily had a bad experience with Creative Soundblasters) then the Terratec DMX Xfire is a worthy alternative in the mid-range soundcard market. It doesn't shout, but it does make itself heard.



## VIDEO LOGIC

## SONIC VORTEX 2

**DISTRIBUTOR** Videologic 1800 067 722

**PRICE** N/A

**URL** [www.videlogic.com](http://www.videlogic.com)

Now here's a card with an interesting story. Aureal Semiconductors Inc produced the only real alternative to the ubiquitous Soundblaster EMU10k audio engine, until the middle of 2000 whereupon they were bought up by Creative and asset stripped. Well, maybe not asset stripped, but any useful technology was assimilated into the Creative hive-consciousness and the rest was discarded. After all, resistance is futile.

Using the Aureal Vortex 2 audio processor, this card of course supports all iterations of A3D, with particularly good performance in A3D 2.0. Of the lower-end cards, this had the best Quake3 sound on the Philips speakers, with some serious surround action.

Also, like the AOpen card, the Sonic Vortex 2 includes an optical out port for connection with all manner of nifty little digital devices, chief among which is the mighty minidisc. Unfortunately, unlike the AOpen card, the Sonic Vortex 2 doesn't include an optical cable, so an extra \$30 should be factored in to the price if you intend to do some optical work with it.

But functionality and performance aside, the main problem with this card is the lack of driver support. With the demise of Aureal Semiconductors Inc no further driver updates will be made available. Of course, the Win95, Win98 and NT drivers for this card are stable, and it's only Win2000 that has beta driver support and nothing more. However, like the SonicFury the Sonic Vortex 2 has a surprisingly complete software package including many of the applications included with the more expensive card. It's Videologic's style, dontcherknow.

If this card seems the very fellow for you, it's best to move quickly. Videologic isn't importing these any more, so a limited supply remains in the country. But with other options available such as the Guillemot MUSE and the SB PCI128, it's difficult to see why you'd bother with a product that runs a chipset which is no longer supported by any manufacturer.

PCPP

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VALUE  
EXTRAS**



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**POWER  
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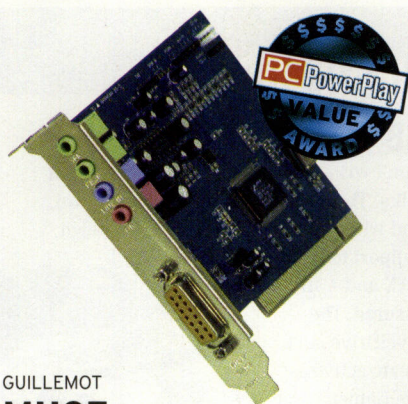


PCPD

**POWER  
VALUE  
EXTRA**







## GUILLEMOT MUSE

**DISTRIBUTOR** Guillemot 02 8303 1818

**PRICE** \$79.95

**URL** [www.guillemot.com](http://www.guillemot.com)

It's a little bit of a shame that Guillemot has decided to ditch most of the Maxi Sound range in favour of distributing under the Hercules brand, because we have fond memories of many Maxi Sound products, not the least of which were the Home Studio 64 and the Maxi Sound Fortissimo which found favour with us because of its optical out in a relatively cheap soundcard package.

The MUSE - MULTimedia Sound Entertainment if you please - is born of a very admirable philosophy; to provide users with a high spec card for a low end price. At \$80 it's certainly cheap, so we weren't expecting too much in the tests. Fortunately though, we were pleasantly surprised.

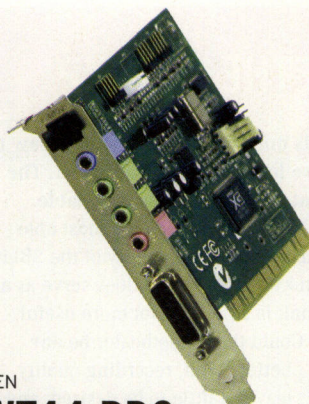
The MUSE supports all the major audio APIs including EAX and A3D 1.0. It's also a true four-channel card, with stereo outputs for front and rear speaker sets. While the Boston DT6000 didn't work with this card, having too many speakers, the Philips set was absolutely fantastic, giving sound reproduction on par with the SBLive! 5.1. Unfortunately there's no support for A3D 2.0 so Quake3 surround effects aren't heard, although normal game sounds are just fine.

The only inputs are a stereo 1/8th inch jack, and mono microphone jack so recording is limited. In fact the MUSE's recording performance was pretty ordinary, with a distinct electronic 'fuzz' added to our witty comments recorded to minidisc.

However, the MUSE has a very nice software package, including Acid DJ XPress, which is a very good loop-based mixing suite found in some of the more expensive packages in this PowerTest, and also Kool Karaoke Lite, which was embarrassing in the PCPP offices, but still a lot of fun.

This card offers the same functionality but superior sound to the SoundBlaster PCI128 Digital at a significantly lower price. With 4 channel support, environmental audio and even a decent little software package, the MUSE is more than deserving of this month's Value award.

PCPP



## AOPEN AW744 PRO

**DISTRIBUTOR** Aus PC Market

**PRICE** \$68.95

**URL** [www.auspcmarket.com.au](http://www.auspcmarket.com.au)

It was a relatively near thing for the Value award this month, with the AOpen AW744 proving strong competition to Guillemot's MUSE. At less than \$70 the price is very attractive for a card of this specification.

Of immediate note is the AOpen's optical out port, providing connectivity to digital recorders such as minidisc or DAT. The package also includes an optical cable with a plug converter so it will connect directly to a small portable recorder. Since these cables on their own retail at around \$30, this is a very welcome bonus.

On the flip side though, the card supports only 4 speaker surround and Sensaura 3D audio positioning, which is now rather obscure. Without EAX or A3D functionality, game sounds on this card come across as rather flat and a bit lifeless compared to the MUSE.

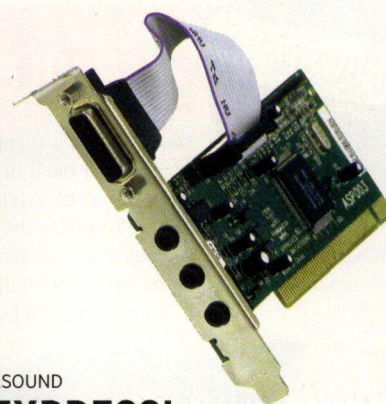
We ran this card up against our 'control' SBLive! 5.1 using the Philips speakers. The difference, especially in bass, was very easy to notice; this card really doesn't churn out the big sounds like the SBLive! One of the listening points in the Quake3 test was for the bass rumble of passing rockets, which comes up beautifully when using the MUSE but is all but absent on this card.

The software package is only modest, with a bunch of fairly obscure applications including Music Center 32 in which you can "organise favor song list" and Aopen (sic) Music Recorder which allows "different Bits, Sample rate", whatever the hell that is.

Also, rather than being fully Soundblaster compatible, the card is DirectSound and DirectMusic compatible which means that although any problems are unlikely (we didn't encounter any) it does lack the peace of mind that full SB compatibility brings with it.

This AOpen card costs very little and has modest performance to match. The MUSE costs \$20 more and has far superior performance, which is why in the end the AOpen AW744 Pro loses out in the value stakes, despite the inclusion of an optical connector and cable.

PCPP



## ASOUND EXPRESS!

**DISTRIBUTOR** Aus PC Market

**PRICE** \$17

**URL** [www.auspcmarket.com](http://www.auspcmarket.com)

Yes well. What to say about this little fellow? It's a 32bit sound card with a game port and plugs for line out, line in and microphone. The PCB is so tiny there's a ribbon cable connecting the gameport to the card itself. This is clearly one for those folks putting together a PC who need an interim soundcard while they save up for some massive professional thing.

One thing the Asound Express does is remind us that we shouldn't take modern soundcards for granted. If we had reviewed either of the speaker sets used in this PowerTest on this card, we would have criticised them for the flatness of sound, the lack of bass, the tinniness of the treble.

And of course the Asound Express doesn't support any sort of audio processing beyond simple stereo reproduction, which once again makes you realise how much a powerful soundcard adds to a game. Without such extras as Environmental Audio eXtensions, every environment sounds exactly the same, with no acoustical variance, or effects such as echoes and Doppler shifts.

But let's not be too harsh on the Asound Express. It does, after all, only cost \$17. And it's difficult to say that for less than three large pizzas, home delivered, this soundcard isn't good value for money. It does indeed make sound. MP3 playback is like listening to tunes on your baby sister's Barbie Fun Time Cassette Recorder with Twin Speaker System, but you can recognise the songs, and that's all you need in order to be able to organise your MP3 collection while waiting for the cheque to clear.

No one is going to use this card for an extended period of time, but if you need an interim solution while your extremely hardcore RME Project Hammerfall 52 Channel is shipped in from the States, then the Asound Express will at least enable you to hear those vital system alerts. After all, what's good enough for Meg Ryan is good enough for you. You've Got Mail!

PCPP





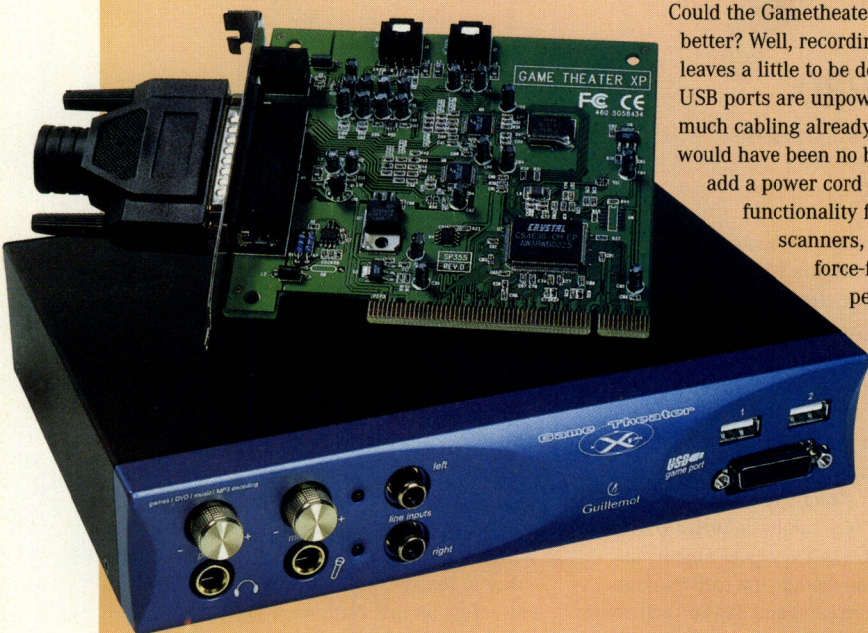


## HERCULES GAMETHEATER XP

Okay so who's surprised about this one? Ever since we first saw the Gametheater back in PCPP#58 we've loved it. The black steel. The blue finish on the fascia. The really fat and serious-looking cable. The Gamtheater wins the power award simply because it's the most able gaming sound solution available on the shelves today, offering all the functionality of the SBLive! Platinum 5.1 but saving users \$160. Sure it doesn't have a funky remote, but it does serve as a four-port USB hub, which we think is a hell of a lot more useful.

Could the Gametheater be any better? Well, recording quality leaves a little to be desired, and the USB ports are unpowered. With so much cabling already included it would have been no big thang to add a power cord and thus functionality for cameras, scanners, printers and force-feedback game peripherals.

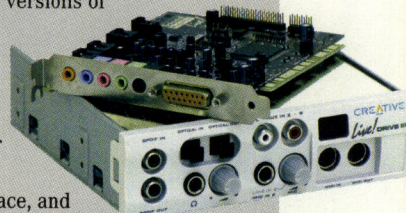
Still, it's a tiny gripe. Buy this card. It will love you forever.



## NEAR MISSES...

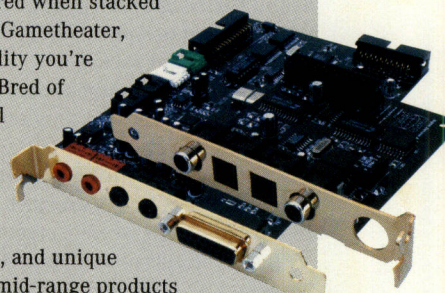
### SB LIVE! PLATINUM 5.1

Don't write off Creative's flagship just yet folks. This is still a hugely powerful card, and with firmware that can be upgraded, support for later versions of EAX and A3D is assured. The Live!Drive isn't as attractive as the Gametheater but it certainly takes up less space, and the funky remote is indeed the funkiest thing since funk itself. The only thing that really makes us poo-poo the Platinum is its price. At \$499, it's difficult to compete with cheaper, equally powerful products. Law of the jungle, baby.



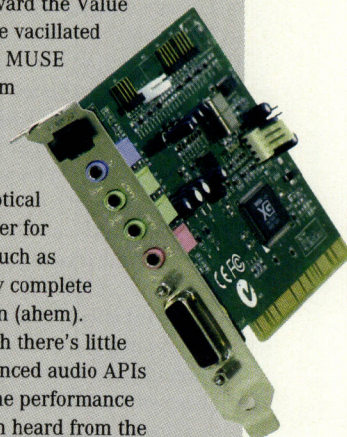
### TERRATEC DMX

Okay so it's expensive and comparatively underpowered when stacked against the Gametheater, but it's quality you're paying for. Bred of professional audio stock, the DMX is a very solid card indeed, and unique among the mid-range products for actually having very good recording ability. If karaoke is your thing and gold plated inputs sound excitingly chic, then the DMX should not be dismissed. Just try and argue the salesman down from the cringingly high price.



### AOPEN AW744

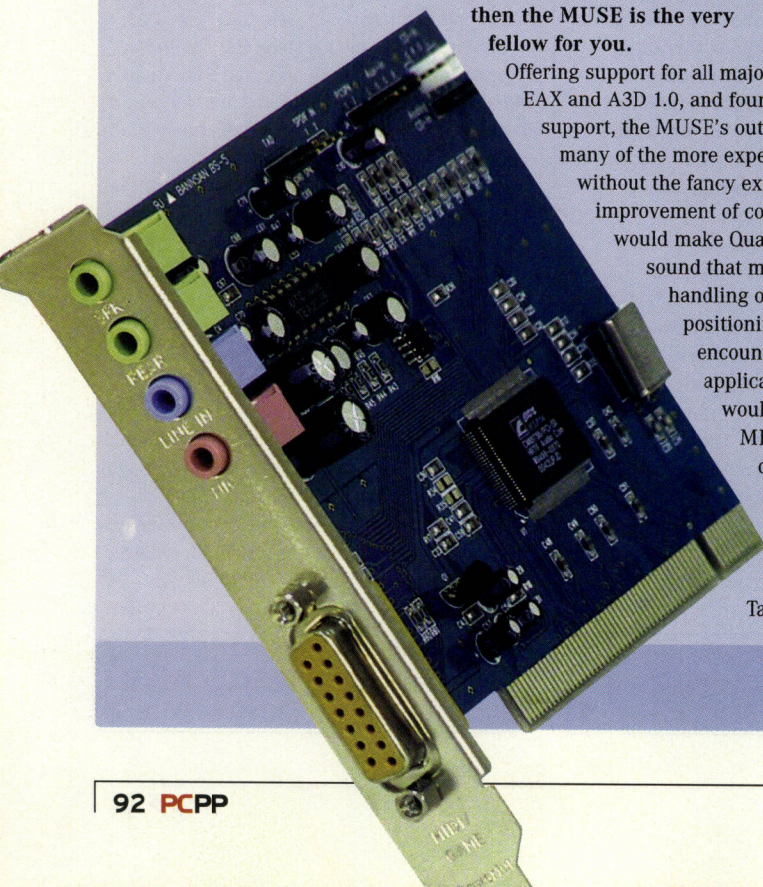
In the decision to award the Value award this month we vacillated bitterly between the MUSE and this offering from AOpen. With the inclusion of both an optical out port and an expensive optical cable with a converter for portable recorders such as minidisks, it's a very complete MP3 backup solution (ahem). Unfortunately though there's little support for the advanced audio APIs such as EAX, so game performance lacks the extra depth heard from the MUSE. But the price is very attractive. If optical out is a priority, the AW744 is worthy of consideration.



## GUILLEMOT MUSE

If you just need to get in and play games and really can't stand the thought of watching DVD on your PC (because you own an excellent Pioneer player) and don't have a heck of a lot of cash to spare, then the MUSE is the very fellow for you.

Offering support for all major audio APIs including EAX and A3D 1.0, and four channel speaker support, the MUSE's output is just as good as many of the more expensive cards, albeit without the fancy extras. There is room for improvement of course. Support for A3D 2.0 would make Quake3 and others of its ilk sound that much better, with proper handling of the complex audio positioning routines, er, routinely encountered in these applications. An optical out would also make dumping MP3s to minidisc or other digital device all the sweeter. But for less than \$100, no other card offers so much, in such a low-fat package. Tasty stuff indeed.





# TOSHIBA SD-1250. THE ULTIMATE MOVIE TOY



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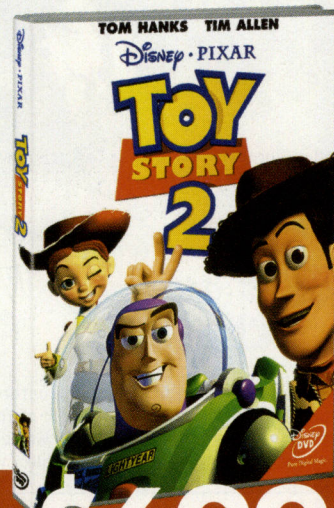
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# 21" MONITOR SHOWDOWN

SICK OF CRAMPED, FISHBOWL GAMING, **ANTHONY FORDHAM** EXAMINES TWO OF THE LATEST DISPLAY BEHEMOTHS

So you've saved up a bushel of cash and the car is paid off. Your 1GHz Athlon system with the Hercules Prophet II Ultra is fanging along beautifully, only to be let down by its 15" Aquariumtastic screen. It's time at last to invest in a 21" monitor.

But first, the caveats. For a start, if you don't have a powerful 3D graphics card capable of 1600 x 1200, and a CPU capable of handling a game at that resolution, there's probably not much point in buying a 21" screen. Also, it's important to realise that these things take up a hell of a lot of desk space. Yuppies living in inner-city studio

loft apartments full of low horizontal clean surfaces will be fine, but uni students will be unlikely to be able to fit both themselves and their new monitor into a typical dorm room.

The two monitors we've had in the PCPP Bunker for the last month are both flat-screen models, and when attached to powerful PCs are incredible. Games become much more immersive, text is easier to read, and even though there's a heck of a lot more radiation bombarding your

entire head, the screen is much easier on the eyes. And the ability to run in resolutions as high as 2048 x 1536 opens up a whole new world of graphical splendour and at long last gives your GeForce2 Ultra a decent workout.

The only danger with a 21" monitor is that once you have one, you can never go back. You'll wonder how you ever survived on a screen smaller than the average TV.

We took a look at monitors from Philips and Sony, and if you can spare the cash, and have a PC that can make the most of these displays, both are well worth your consideration.

## SONY G520 FD TRINITRON

Sony's previous model, the G500 was one of the first flat-screen 21" displays on the market, released toward the middle of 1999. For a long while now, the FD Trinitron has been PCPP's monitor of choice in the Beast, but while this new iteration of the venerable Trinitron line is still an excellent monitor, it hasn't taken advantage of some new technological developments found in the Philips.

For a start though, the front of the monitor has been completely restyled from the previous model. While the G500 FD Trinitron was a masterpiece of elegance, Sony's new two-tone design comes out looking a little bulky and unwieldy. However, the odd eight-way hat control of the G500 has been replaced with a standard collection of buttons so adjusting the monitor is very easy.

Like the Philips, the G520 has two wire shadows that split the screen in thirds. These



shadows mark the position of internal structure that supports the enormous aperture grill of the monitor, but unless viewing a completely white screen, these shadows are rarely noticeable.

Dot pitch is still at .24 inches, which is very respectable. However, we found that when we set the desktop resolution to something really stupid like 2048 x 1536, the fonts on desktop icons were quite blurred and extremely difficult to read. Also, it's important to install the correct monitor driver for this display, as using Windows' default Plug'n'Play driver results in a quite noticeably blurred image.

Sony has also included a 4 port USB hub in the bottom of the monitor housing; a highly useful new feature. Unfortunately though, when compared to the Philips with its true-flat screen, better colour, smaller housing and slightly lower price, the days of Trinitron domination in the 21" market do indeed appear to be numbered.

### PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR Sony Australia

PRICE \$2399

URI www.sony.com.au

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## PHILIPS 201P

Constant readers will recall that the inhabitants of PC PowerPlay's tech bunker have long been rabid, ranting fans of Sony's Trinitron monitors. Well, this month we have found a new contender.

The Philips 201P has a slightly larger viewable screen; 20" versus Sony's 19.8". The 201P also has a true-flat screen whereas the Sony only has a visibly flat screen. This means that the rear layer of the screen on the Sony is actually curved, while only the front is flat. The Philips however, is flat all the way, front to back. This doesn't make a huge difference to a properly adjusted image, but we did find the Philips a far easier monitor to set up, particularly when switching PCs.

Another of those famous 'killer features' sported by the 201P is the fact that at the time of writing, this is the shortest 21" monitor tube in the world. Measuring



less than 50cm from front to back, it's feasible to stick this mighty giant where there was only a 17" midget before. Colour, clarity, text, straight lines, curved lines, gradients and block colours were



all without fault. Like the Sony, this monitor has the thin aperture grill shadows, but once again, these are unobtrusive and are small price to pay for a screen this beautiful.

There's also a four port USB hub in the bottom of the monitor, so all your most desirable peripherals can be slotted right in for instant action.

Gaming on the Philips 201P is like nothing else. In fact, we found that we had to stop reviewing games on it, because it was skewing our scores; everything looks great! Even Nicktoons racing! And DVD playback... you will never go near your TV again.

If you have the cash and the PC to do it justice, this is the 21" monitor of choice. Coming soon, to a PCPP Beast near you.

### PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR Philips Australia

PRICE \$2259

URI www.philips.com.au

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HERCULES

## 3D PROPHET III

DISTRIBUTOR

Guillemot 02 8303 1818

PRICE

\$1199

URL

www.hercules.com

Right then. Constant readers will recall last month's somewhat abortive preview of the Hercules 3D Prophet III, the first videocard in Australia to feature nVidia's coveted GeForce3 Graphics Processing Unit. At the time we were unable to publish benchmarking results because the official Hercules drivers for the card didn't exist. Well, now we have the drivers, we have the test machine, we have the card, and we're ready to go.

We need to stress that the 3D Prophet III featured in this review is a pre-production model, an engineering card designed to iron out the last few kinks in Hercules' design. We can safely say though, that there are very few kinks to be ironed; this is, simply put, the most powerful videocard we have ever seen. It's the new master, the new champion, the new object to lust after, the new display in the shop window to press your little forehead against and sigh, "If only I had \$1200!"

## First onto the beach

Being the first can be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, Hercules has the edge over its competitors, especially with its already well-established retail distribution network. On the other hand, everyone else will be watching and learning from any mistakes. But from what we've seen, even at this early stage, this card will be a hard act to follow.

Like the 3D Prophet II Ultra, the 3D Prophet III features a standard VGA output as well as a port for a digital flat-panel display, and TV-out. The much-anticipated NV20 chipset is cooled by an enormous heatsink/fan combo and the 64Mb of RAM is covered by massive heatsinks similar to those found on some GeForce2 MX chips.

The drivers we used with this pre-production card were Hercules' prototype drivers for their 3D Prophet III range. We figured that the Prophet III didn't deserve to be cut any slack, so we pitched it against Hercules' own GeForce2 Ultra, winner of PC PowerPlay's Power Award and videocard of choice in The Beast.

As last month's Spotlight feature on the GeForce3 explained, the Prophet III is clocked the same as the Prophet II Ultra, with a 200MHz core and 460Mhz RAMDAC. Before we tested the new card, we sat around the office saying things like "well, remember there aren't any games optimised for the GeForce3 yet" and "the programmable pixel pipeline stuff will be really impressive, when it comes out" and even "it probably won't be that much more powerful than an Ultra."

## BENCHMARKS

3DMark 2000 - 1280 x 1024 32 bit colour; 3DMarks

ULTRA

5108

PROPHET III

5887

Quake 3 Arena - 1280 x 1024 32 bit colour; Frames per second

ULTRA

80.3

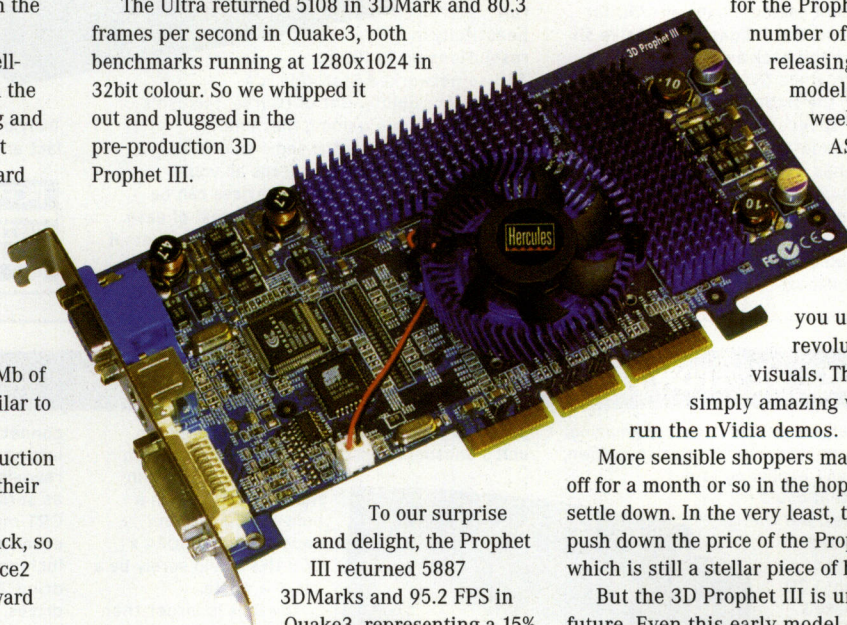
PROPHET III

95.2

## Expect the unexpected

So to the benchmarks. Because this is a high-end card, we used a high-end system. An Athlon 1.2GHz with 256Mb of PC-133 RAM running on an ASUS A7V133 motherboard. First we ran the benchmark on our 3D Prophet II Ultra using Quake3 and 3DMark2000.

The Ultra returned 5108 in 3DMark and 80.3 frames per second in Quake3, both benchmarks running at 1280x1024 in 32bit colour. So we whipped it out and plugged in the pre-production 3D Prophet III.



To our surprise and delight, the Prophet III returned 5887 3DMarks and 95.2 FPS in Quake3, representing a 15% improvement in Direct3D and an 18% improvement in OpenGL. These are significant results. This is a hella powerful card.

Remember, this was under DirectX 8.0, using just-released Hercules prototype drivers, on an engineering sample board. Outperforming a GeForce2 Ultra by nearly 20% makes the 3D Prophet III an extremely powerful investment, sure to last for the next two years. And once GeForce3 optimised games start hitting the shelves, this card will go from strength to strength.

Investment is the key word here, however. Parting with \$1199 should give even the spendiest of the spenders pause for thought. However, consider this is only \$200 more than an Ultra. If you've got the money for the older card there's no reason why you shouldn't

scrape together the extra razzos for the Prophet III. With a number of companies releasing GeForce3 models in the coming weeks, including ASUS, the GeForce2 cards will start to fall behind. And purchase of a GF3 sets you up for the next revolution in gaming visuals. This chipset is simply amazing when asked to run the nVidia demos.

More sensible shoppers may choose to hold off for a month or so in the hope that prices settle down. In the very least, the Prophet III will push down the price of the Prophet II Ultra which is still a stellar piece of hardware.

But the 3D Prophet III is undeniably the future. Even this early model outperformed our expectations, and we were expecting something special. If you must have the very best, regardless of the cost, then this is the card for you.

PCPP

Even more powerful than expected, the phattest card in the universe. But also the most stupidly expensive

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# MINI PC SHOWDOWN

LIVING IN A SHOEBOX IN MIDDLE O' ROAD, **ANTHONY FORDHAM** TAKES A GANDER AT SOME SPACE-SAVING PCS

Are people always stuffing with your machine? Do you come home after a hard day's not being able to play games only to find your housemate surfing for lentil recipes on your precious PC, and because they pay half of the Net access, you can't kick them off? Do you perhaps, even have children? Whose delightful, sticky little fingers leave your Quake3 dominating optical mouse limp and useless?

Clearly, you need a second machine. A 'common PC' for the living room, family room, hall or broom closet. But because all your

money has been spent on a: your family and b: your massive gaming rig with the 21" Philips 201P and the GeForce2 Ultra, you only had enough left over for a relatively small house, so space is at a premium.

Ironically though, you need to pay bigger dollars for smaller computers, so both these funky looking devices weigh in at a significant portion of \$5000. However, they're both powerful, reliable, simple to set up and use, and perfect for distracting family members away from

your 'real' PC by dint of their pretty colours and LCD screens. And because they have ethernet adaptors rather than modems, you can set up a home network and still maintain overriding control of the modem or cable Net connection. So your crazy ex-third flatmate's Napster antics need no longer take up precious Quake3 bandwidth.

We took a look at two mini or 'legacy fee' PCs from Acer and Compaq to determine

which would be the more useful as a second PC for the home.

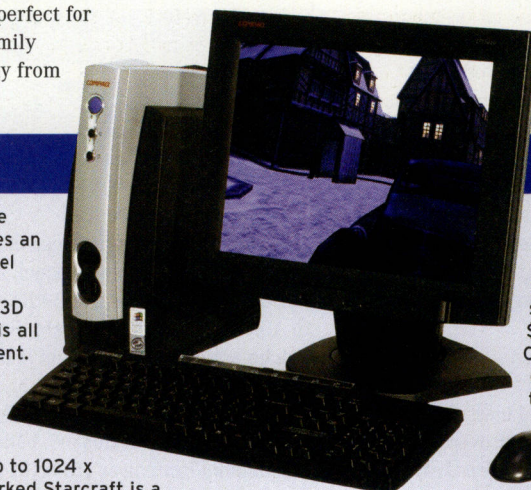
## COMPAQ IPAC DESKTOP 2

Sporting a PIII 866MHz processor and a chunkalicious 128Mb of RAM, this teeny little thing runs Windows 2000 Professional so you need only ever turn it on once. Also, taking a leaf from Apple's design book, like the G4 Cube the IPAC Desktop 2 has a fan grill in the top of the unit and a small fan at the bottom. This results in a virtually silent machine. Black and sleek, you need never know it's even there.

Like the Acer, the Desktop 2 uses all-USB for keyboard and mouse. But it boasts a massive six USB ports; four on the back and four on the front. What's more, while five of the ports share the one controller, the sixth port has full dedicated bandwidth, which speeds up the performance of scanners, digital cameras and other powered devices. The unit has a decent mono speaker built in that gives adequate sound reproduction for everything up to and including Diablo 2, and there are also stereo in/out plugs for a set of speakers, so this machine could definitely find a place as a downstairs MP3 jukebox.

However, the Desktop 2 uses an integrated Intel graphics processor, so 3D performance is all but non-existent. All your 2D games will run beautifully in resolutions up to 1024 x 768 so networked Starcraft is a definite possibility. But of course, this isn't supposed to be a gaming machine.

The 32x CD-ROM is the same as one from a Compaq notebook, which means all your removable notebook storage devices can be plugged into the unit with the greatest of ease. And a 10/100 integrated ethernet adaptor gets it on the home network without fuss. There's no floppy drive though.



Also note that the price quoted here is with a crisp 15" LCD monitor which saves a hell of a lot of space, but adds around \$2300. With a standard 15" CRT, the unit retails at a very decent \$2500. Finally though the extremely small, extremely light tower of the Desktop 2 can be hidden in the smallest of places, making this machine virtually invisible. Truly one for the hall table, the kitchen table, in fact anywhere people want to surf the net.

### PCPP

**DISTRIBUTOR** Compaq  
**PRICE** \$4358  
**URL** [www.compaq.com.au](http://www.compaq.com.au)

**79**

## ACER VERITON FP2

This little machine is simply amazing. When we embarked on this showdown, we weren't expecting to get

anything that could actually play games. But the FP2, with its included GeForce2 MX graphics card and fast bright LCD screen, makes Quake3 deathmatches on the home network a very real possibility.

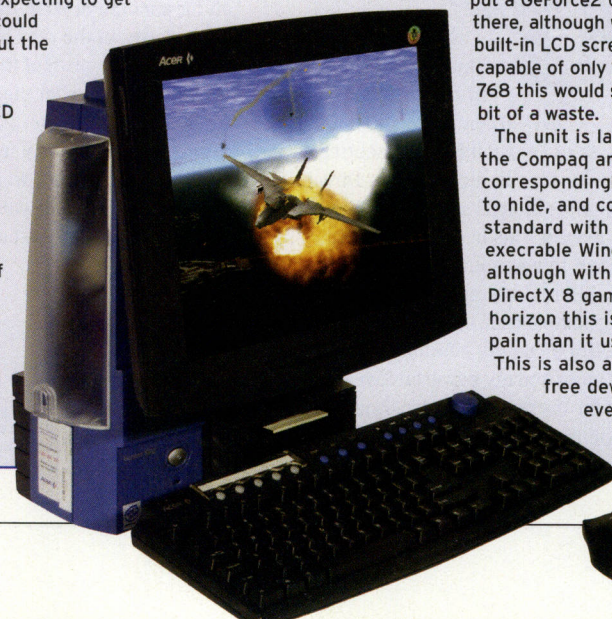
With a Pentium III CPU running at 800MHz, and 128Mb of RAM, the FP2 has plenty of resources to keep up with pretty much anything you throw at it. The amazing graphics performance is

provided by an AGP 4x slot in the back of the unit's unusual case. This means you could even put a GeForce2 Ultra in there, although with a built-in LCD screen capable of only 1024 x 768 this would surely be a bit of a waste.

The unit is larger than the Compaq and correspondingly harder to hide, and comes standard with the execrable Windows Me, although with more DirectX 8 games on the horizon this is less of a pain than it used to be. This is also a legacy-free device, with everything

connecting via USB. However, removal of a large translucent plastic cover on the side reveals all the necessary ports for devices such as serial port modems, printers, or a separate CRT monitor. It also has a built in 10/100 ethernet adaptor for home networking. Also included is a 24x CD-ROM and even a floppy drive. Both can be replaced with DVD or CD-RW drives, also from Acer.

Because of the built in LCD, you're stuck with a price tag of \$4799, but this is worth it, since this little baby takes up very little space, runs like the wind and plays any game you care to throw at it! The only obvious disadvantage in using the Veriton FP2 as your second machine is that your gaming rig may end up dusty with neglect. You've been warned.



### PCPP

**DISTRIBUTOR** Acer  
**PRICE** \$4799  
**URL** [www.acer.com.au](http://www.acer.com.au)

**91**



EMAGEN

## 1.2GHZ ATHLON GAMES PC

DISTRIBUTOR Emagen 02 9299 0271 PRICE \$3355 URL www.emagen.com.au

Emagen is a funky young company at a funky young address - York St, Sydney - with a whole bunch of funky ideas that have resulted in some seriously powerful, seriously funky gaming machines. A quick visit to Emagen's website reveals a variety of pre-configured games PCs which can further be tweaked using their useful configuration utility. The unit we received for test is a slightly cut down variant of the Vitesse 1.2GT+, Emagen's premium games machine. Various sacrifices have been made to keep the price of the unit below \$3500.

The most instantly obvious standout point of this machine is the Hercules Prophet II Ultra graphics card running the ultra-powerful GeForce2 Ultra GPU. Rest assured, there is nothing this machine can't handle. From Giants to Hitman, to Quake3 in 32bit colour and all settings on maximum.

## Vanilla flavoured

Aside from the graphics card though, the machine is rather plain. The 1.2GHz Athlon is an excellent choice for gamers, but it's partnered with only 128Mb of RAM, so the Windows desktop feels slower to use than on the 1GHz 256Mb machine we reviewed last month from Pioneer. Of course, it could also be because Emagen has chosen to go with Windows ME as the operating system, rather than Win98 SE. For a home PC, used by the whole family, calmly browsing a few online stores, WinME is fine and dandy, but it just causes too much pain for us gamers to be bothered with.

Storage is handled by a 7,200rpm Quantum Hard drive, weighing in at 20Gb. This is slightly disappointing as many cheaper systems are shipping

with 30Gb drives, although the 7,200rpm spindle speed does reduce load times a little bit.

The system rides on the redoubtable ASUS A7V motherboard. This is a good, older board with excellent overclocking potential and plenty of room for expansion with 5 PCI slots. Emagen assures us though that all future models of this PC will ship with the ASUS A7V133 motherboard featuring the newer KT133A chipset.

The system is rounded off with an SB Live! value (so no LivePanel IR) and a 12x DVD drive as well as the usual floppy drive. There are also only two USB ports, despite the fact the A7V motherboard supports four and usually comes with a backplate with two extra ports, something else Emagen hasn't included. There's also a no frills Netcomm 56K modem.

## WYSIWYG

So basically what we're looking at here is a very plain machine stripped down for one thing, and one thing only; graphical speed. With a fast processor, an adequate RAM spec and the fastest readily available videocard at time of writing, it's a hell of a machine for 3D gaming. But for the best part of \$3400, we want our PCs to be a little bit more.

When we first turned it on, we were shocked by how noisy the thing was. Emagen uses the successor to the GlobalWin FOP38 CPU fan, the WBK38. With similar performance, this newer fan also has the noise to match. The PowerPlay testing bunker is right near the dark and foetid den inhabited by the art directors - our Shon and Hyper's Malky - and they were driven nearly spare by the noise from this PC. We simply could not leave it running without it giving trained professionals terrible headaches. Of course at home it's a simple matter to stuff it under the desk out of

harm's way, so the noise is probably small price to pay for performance.

The main problem with this machine is that it costs nearly \$600 more than the Pioneer PC reviewed last month for a 3D graphical performance increase of about 20%, but with only half the RAM. Once you hit that magical \$3000 mark it's fair to start expecting things like network adaptors and CD-Writers, not to mention 40Gb hard drives.

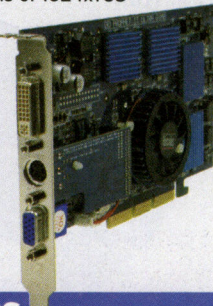
## Slightly crippled

By choosing the 3D Prophet II Ultra, Emagen has limited the amount of extra features it can include in this package. It may have been more sensible to go with a Prophet

## ULTRA PRICEY

Now you might well be getting all excited about the Prophet II Ultra in this machine but perhaps you should think twice. Such a hugely expensive card really limits the extra options Emagen is able to include in the PC. Don't forget that up to and including resolutions of 1024x768

a GeForce2 MX is a very effective card indeed, and good MX cards - such as the 3D Prophet II MX from Hercules - can be had for rather less than a third of the cost of an ultra, leaving \$600 for 16x CD burners and the like. Think about it



## SYSTEM SPECS

■ PROCESSOR	AMD Athlon 1.2GHz
■ RAM	128Mb PC-133
■ MOTHERBOARD	ASUS A7V
■ VIDEO	Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra
■ OPTICAL	12x DVD-ROM
■ STORAGE	Quantum 20Gb 7,200rpm HDD
■ MODEM	Netcomm 56k internal
■ MONITOR	Hitachi CM615 17" 1280x1024 @ 75Hz
■ EXPANSION	5 x PCI, 1 x AGP, 1 x CNR, 2 x USB, 2x serial, 1x parallel

II GTS Pro, leaving plenty of room for 256Mb of RAM and a CD-RW. Otherwise though, the price is quite reasonable, if you can get your head around the fact that fully a third of the value of this PC is represented in the videocard alone.

These limitations are compounded by the choice of monitor. As mentioned above, the GeForce2 Ultra only makes itself worth the cash at resolutions higher than 1024x768 - otherwise you might as well stick with an MX. And with a monitor incapable of displaying 1600x1200, you will not be able to enjoy all the benefits this card has to offer. So perhaps there was a little bit of woolly thinking on the part of Emagen when it came to putting this package together. Excellent components and great performance are in some respects crippled by the monitor and by spending too much on the videocard. But if you already own a 19" screen and only ever play Q3A or UT, then this is machine is definitely worth a second look.

Anthony Fordham



## PCPP

A heck of a 3D performer but lacking on extra features. More RAM and a CD-RW would have made it shine

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## Hotware Reviews

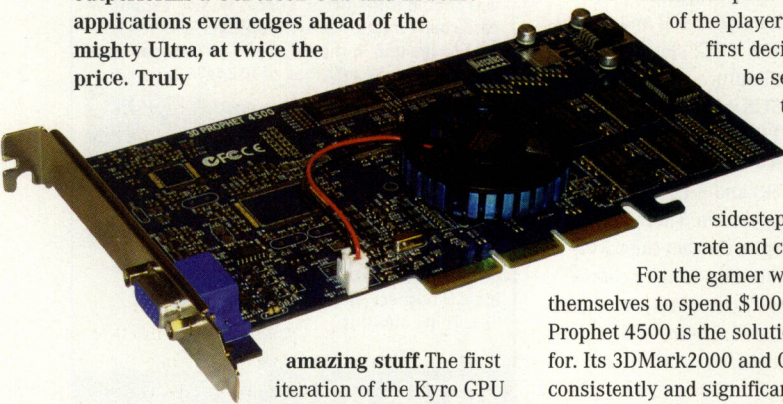
HERCULES

## 3D PROPHET 4500 64MB

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 8303 1818 PRICE \$499 URL www.hercules.com



The Prophet 4500 is a very exciting piece of gear indeed. Using PowerVR's Kyro II chip, this \$500 card consistently outperforms a GeForce2 GTS and in some applications even edges ahead of the mighty Ultra, at twice the price. Truly



amazing stuff. The first iteration of the Kyro GPU was interesting but not

spectacular; Videologic's Vivid! performed well in our PowerTest (PCPP#58) but was not significantly ahead of the more readily available GeForce2 MX cards. In the end, the Vivid! was not sold in Australia, but thankfully the Kyro line hasn't died out.

The key to Kyro II's amazing performance is Tile Based Rendering. While the GeForce2 renders an entire environment then ditches whichever parts can't be seen because of the player's position, the Kyro II first decides which parts can't be seen, and then renders the leftovers. This dramatically reduces the load on the GPU and neatly sidesteps nVidia's brute fill-rate and clockspeed advantage.

For the gamer who just can't bring themselves to spend \$1000 on a videocard, the Prophet 4500 is the solution you've been waiting for. Its 3DMark2000 and Quake3 scores are consistently and significantly ahead of GeForce2 GTS 64Mb cards that retail at \$800. And in Serious Sam, which as an application has very little software optimisation of the rendering engine, at higher resolutions the Prophet 4500 beats the GeForce2 Ultra by anything up to 10fps.

Let's repeat that once more: this card, which costs \$500, has it in itself to beat a GF2 Ultra,

which costs \$1000. Is this real? Can this really be? Yes, it's all true.

Hercules' build of this card is up to their usual standard. It's a 64Mb card in both AGP and PCI models (the PCI model is \$50 cheaper) and because of the lower clock speeds, there are no heat sinks on the RAM and only a small fan on the chip and the amount of heat generated by the card is negligible.

Sure, MX cards can be found now for less than \$200, but the Prophet 4500 canes these budget cards and plants itself firmly in the upper end of videocard performance. But it brings with it a mid-range price.

If you are running a modest system with anything less than 128Mb of RAM and only a 17" monitor, then quite simply, this is the videocard you should be using. You will definitely not be disappointed.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

King of the budget cards and a worthy alternative to the nVidia monopoly, the 4500 performs beyond expectations

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VIDEOLOGIC

## DIGITHEATRE DTS

DISTRIBUTOR Videologic 1800 067 722 PRICE \$1495 URL www.videologic.com

For \$1500 you want to be sure that you're getting superior quality speakers that just blow every other audio experience you've ever had clean out of the water. And while the DigiTheatre DTS is a quality package, the experience of using these speakers is only good, rather than spectacular.

Like the Boston DigitalTheater6000 the DigiTheatre DTS is a six speaker kit featuring four satellites, a subwoofer, and a centre channel which also holds the display and controls.

Where the DigiTheatre is immediately more practical than the DT6000 is in the replication of all controls on the centre channel unit, while the Boston speakers can only be controlled by the remote. Of course this makes the centre unit about four times bigger than the centre channel of the Bostons.

When it comes to sound quality, the DigiTheatre is good, but can't effectively compete with the higher-spec Boston offering. With slightly smaller speakers, Videologic also seems to suffer from not building its own speaker cones but instead using Audex technology, as sound reproduction is simply not

as good as what is heard from the Boston speakers. The satellites take up less space than the Boston satellites, but feel much flimsier and more plasticky.

And the subwoofer is a real monster. Sheathed in dodgy plywood, it's difficult to find a spot for this enormous thing. Videologic says the DigiTheatre DTS is rated down to 40Hz over the Boston's 50Hz so bass should theoretically be even more powerful, but since the satellites lose so much midrange, it's just not worth it.

The DigiTheatre does support DTS which the DT6000 doesn't, and it comes with a similar plethora of inputs so you can hook these babies up to the TV, DVD player and CD. But like the Bostons, all inputs are on the back of the subwoofer, making precise positioning for optimum sound equally finicky.

The Videologic DigiTheatre DTS is a quality set up and worthy of a second look, but with the Boston DT6000 retailing at a nearly identical price, it's difficult to recommend these plasticky, ugly speakers over their American rivals.

Anthony Fordham



PCPP

Good but not spectacular, and for \$1500 you deserve spectacular. Also too ugly for the den of the inner-city sophisticate

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ASUS

## CUV266 MOTHERBOARD

**DISTRIBUTOR** Achieva **PRICE** Blah **URL** www.achieva.com.au

■ We here in the dark dingy, damp-stained PCPP Tech Bunker have been constant advocates of DDR motherboards pretty much from the year dot. Or at least, from the year in which DDR motherboards were first announced.

With DDR RAM and RAMBUS still eyeing each other off from the far corners of the Free Market Economy Arena of Death, DDR proponents are attempting to weigh the inevitable conflict in their favour by developing more DDR based solutions, such as the CUV266 from ASUS.

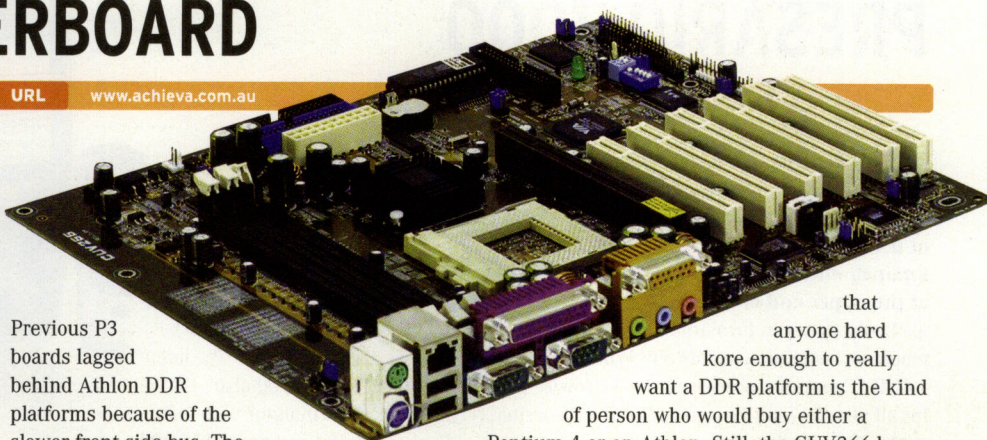
Those readers familiar with ASUS nomenclature will realise immediately that this is a Socket370 board, supporting the little processor that nobody loves any more, the Pentium III. To the layman, the CUV266 is the same as the A7V266 except it takes a P3 rather than an Athlon.

However, this actually entails an entirely new chipset, the VT8233 from VIA. This chipset features a new memory controller called V-Link, operating at a peak bandwidth of 2.1Gb per second. While the chipset supports an incredible 4Gb of RAM, the CUV266 board only has three slots, with a maximum of 3Gb.

Previous P3 boards lagged behind Athlon DDR platforms because of the slower front side bus. The VT8233 chipset has a 133MHz FSB, which can also support older 100MHz P3s and 66MHz Celerons.

Stepping back from the gibberish for a moment though, let's have a look at the experience of running this board. We tested with a Pentium III 1Ghz and 256Mb of PC2100 DDR DRAM and performance was considerably more impressive than with the same processor on our venerable CUSL2-C.

However, performance still lags behind a fat Athlon 1.2GHz on the A7M266. And the total cost of ownership for an Athlon DDR system is still slightly lower. Also, it strikes this reviewer



that anyone hard core enough to really want a DDR platform is the kind of person who would buy either a Pentium 4 or an Athlon. Still, the CUV266 has a number of other bonuses, including an onboard ethernet controller along with 5 PCI slots and support for no fewer than 6 USB ports.

For those users who need DDR but for some weird reason wouldn't buy an Athlon to save their own mothers, the CUV266 is another excellent board from a company who, it seems, can do no wrong.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

A winner, but why do we want DDR Pentium III systems? The Athlon-based A7M266 still gives better results

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PHILIPS

## A.3.500 ACOUSTIC SURROUND SYSTEM

**DISTRIBUTOR** Philips **PRICE** \$349 **URL** www.philips.com.au

■ Speakers systems aim for different things. The TSS-1, reviewed last month, is a good example of the all-rounder PC speaker system. A very decent choice for the price conscious who want their speakers for a number of uses: surround for serious gaming, decent speakers for music and Dolby Digital 5.1 for DVD. In contrast, the Philips A.3.500 goes for a dedicated gaming option rather than an all-round home theatre solution.

The four soft flat panel satellite speakers are placed around your system to create the surround sound experience, with stereo front and left and right surround channels. The wOOx subwoofer goes at your feet under the system. The small form factor belies the fact that the MMS 305/A offers a good deal of power for the outlay.

The three sound setting options (on the very cool remote) are Speech, Music and Game. These offer various equaliser configurations but to the naked ear offer no bass, normal bass and stomach churning bass respectively. The biggest selling point of this system is the bass, especially with the wOOx Bass Driver. wOOx is Philips' patented bass acceleration system, and when activated, the very earth itself throbs. Our extensive Quake

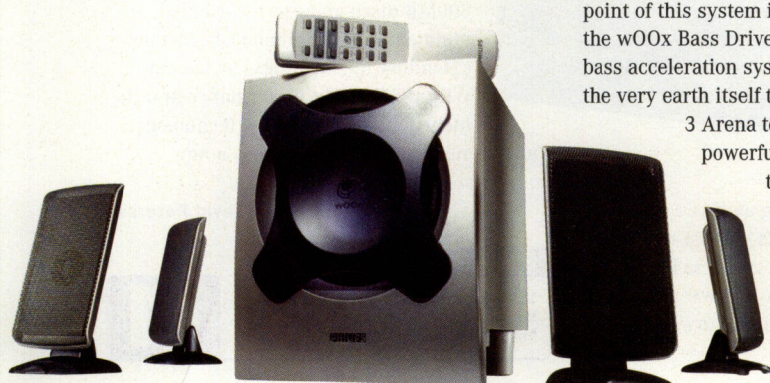
3 Arena test demonstrated powerfully convincing bass from the deceptively small subwoofer chamber.

The higher ranges are another matter on the MMS 305/A. The treble is generally good but definitely lacks the life

of the bass. Philips acknowledges this fact, stating that their NXT technology, using "a thin veil of material, or diaphragm", offers "limiting" performance at high frequencies. Music that tends to the high frequencies sounds a little flat and lacking in clarity. Other music sounds very good, although careful balancing is needed to allow the treble to shine. This bias is reflected in the system controls, which offer flexibility with the bass while the treble is all but static.

Criticism aside, this is a strong gaming sound system, at a very attractive, almost obscenely low price. Setup is particularly straightforward and sufficiently long cables mean the components can be positioned correctly. Versatility is at minimum, since it lacks 5.1 channel sound and outputs to other stereo devices, but overall the Philips A.3.500 is an ideal solution for the needs of the bass addict.

John Dewhurst



PCPP

For games only, this is a strong speaker system with particularly good bass sound and unbeatable price

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## Hotware Reviews

COMPAQ

## PRESARIO 7000

DISTRIBUTOR Compaq PRICE \$6999 URL www.compaq.com.au

■ This thing is a beast. Compaq's last offering for PCPP, the Presario 500, didn't fare too well in PCPP#59, with a paucity of RAM and a crap videocard. Fortunately, Compaq offers a far more impressive package at the upper end of their range.

Every time you turn around with this machine, something stands out. Whether it's the 1.4GHz Pentium 4 processor, the 3 firewire ports for all your DV editing needs, the 12x CD writer, or the DVD, all these go toward making an extremely complete package. The thing that screamed 'hello' at us though was the 75Gb 7200rpm IBM hard drive. That's right, you heard right, 75Gb. That's some fat storage.

To meet the challenge of all this hardware, Compaq has put together a very complete software package, including Adaptec EasyCD for burning backup copies of all your favourite software, to Studio DV, a simple but very functional digital video editing suite, which makes use of those three firewire ports.

Also, Compaq has recognised the GeForce2 MX as a high-performance low-cost 3D solution (as their marketeers would put it) and included

a Creative card in this machine. Coupled with the 1.4GHz processor and 128Mb of PC800 RDRAM, games performance was nothing short of extremely good, with playable framerates found as high as 1280x1024.

The Presario 7000 also includes a 17" monitor with Compaq stylin' and brandin' which is quite heavily curved and probably the package's weakest point. The included JBL speakers give adequate sound, but a subwoofer/satellites combo would have been better.

In many ways the Presario 7000 is the opposite of the mini PCs reviewed on page 96 - it's huge and unavoidable, tricked out in blinding clinical white with big exciting curves. The usual expansion problems also occur, with the HDD mounted vertically in a very cramped space, and all kinds of non-standard screws and clips. But it can do just about anything.

If you need a PC that has a broad range of functionality, including DV editing, the Compaq



Presario 7000 provides an ultra-complete but necessarily expensive package. But because there's so much in here, and because it works right out of the box, it might just be worth spending that extra \$500. Imagine how many computer fairs you'd have to visit to get this amount of kit.

Anthony Fordham

## PCPP

Complete, powerful, reliable, expensive. Impressive specs and a decent videocard puts Compaq back in our good books!

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TDK

## VELOCD CD BURNER

DISTRIBUTOR TDK 1800 651 917 PRICE \$699 URL www.tdk.com.au

■ It's a shame TDK missed out on last month's PowerTest, because this drive has everything the victorious Yamaha 16x offered plus more. For some reason though, TDK has chosen to use a pig-ugly plastic face on the unit, making it look low-quality and nasty, when this drive is anything but.

TDK says the VeloCD can duplicate a music CD in 8 minutes. Our tests used an Athlon 800 MHz with an ATA66 hard drive and ripped a 46 minute music CD with 14 tracks in just over 9 minutes.

The 32x digital audio extraction boasts ripping a 3-minute CD music tack in less than 6 seconds. Our tests were close to this for single tracks and ripped the same 46 minute CD to hard disk in just under 2 minutes.

We tested the drive using new all-black CDs from CAPAX (02 9648 4977). Apart from having the funkier black writing surface, these Digimedia CDs are rated at 16x, which means you can take full advantage of this very fast

drive and reduce that famous 'coaster quotient' well all know so well. For folks without 16x CDs, the VeloCD features BURN-proof technology, unlike the Yamaha which relied solely on its 8Mb buffer to prevent errors.



When it comes to ripping audio CDs, you will find that most CD-ROMs will rip with small errors and can result in pops and clicks on audio files. Visit the website at www.tdk.com and download their test program to see how your CD-ROM stacks up.

The VeloCD package also includes a copy of Nero 5.0, certainly Harry's preferred mastering utility, and inCD, an application that allows an 800Mb CD to be used like a floppy disk, only much faster and with more disk space (*Well duh! - ed*). The included CD-RW will require formatting and takes about 20 minutes, however, this is much faster than other drives we have tested using Adaptec directCD, which can take up to 40 minutes.

The veloCD will can also use 800MB discs and can record 80 minutes of music on one CD, further extending its usefulness as burner. With reliable 16x performance and the inclusion of BURN-proof technology, Yamaha needs to look out; there's a new contender on the block.

David Petersen

## PCPP

Ugly, but packing a hell of a punch. A serious contender for the title of fastest burner available.

91



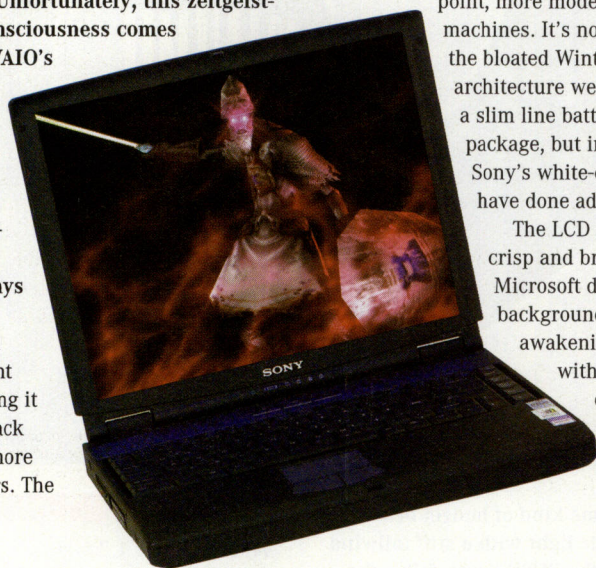
SONY

## VAIO FX770

**DISTRIBUTOR** Sony 1300 137 669 **PRICE** \$3999 **URL** [www.sony.com.au](http://www.sony.com.au)

You can't honestly look at the current crop of Sony products and say, "These guys don't know style." Still, for those who harbour any lingering doubts, the latest VAIO laptops prove beyond doubt Sony's designers have it where it counts; they are sleek, light and utterly desirable (*What, the designers? - ed*). Unfortunately, this zeitgeist-hugging craft consciousness comes at a price, with VAIO's price/performance ratio a little steeper than equivalent pedestrian beige-box rivals, the Dells and Gateways of this world.

The FX770 is a mid-market variant with less separating it from the laptop pack than some of its more expensive brothers. The



review unit came with a barely adequate 64Mb of RAM, a Pentium III 650MHz processor and (as a nod to the business oriented purchaser) Windows 2000 preinstalled on the 20Gb drive. This all adds to a reasonable, but not stellar, performer. However, it's important to remember that laptop specifications are, at any given price

point, more modest than desktop machines. It's not easy forcing the bloated Wintel PC architecture we love so well into a slim line battery-life-friendly package, but in this case Sony's white-coated wizards have done admirably.

The LCD is particularly crisp and bright; that pretty Microsoft default background blue awakening feelings deep within our hoary old chests, feelings that have slumbered since distant

childhood... but anyway, even the internal speakers, long the bane of mobile computing, don't suck too badly. The sound they produce is easily good enough to make watching Manga titles on the internal DVD most enjoyable. But, No Fan Service Please - We're Australian.

Also, as Sony has large parts of the prosumer media-creation space neatly tied and trussed, this laptop provides relatively exotic features such as an internal iLink port (Sony's Firewire implementation) for video capture, and bundled video editing software including Adobe Premier LE. However, if you're planning on getting seriously into the roving movie production game, you'll want to slide some more RAM into the expansion bay on the bottom of the unit.

So, if you're looking for something just a little nicer than all the other laptops in your neighbourhood and don't mind paying a little extra, check out the Vaio PCG-FX770.

### PCPP

Sleek, stylish, light on the lifting arm, but a bit too heavy on the wallet. Definitely one for the style-conscious

80



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Asus 32Mb V7100 Geforce II MX TV Out	\$239.00
Asus 32Mb V7100 Geforce II MX Deluxe Combo	\$469.00
Asus 32Mb V7700 Geforce II GTS DDR Pure	\$519.00
Asus 64Mb V7700 Geforce II GTS DDR Pure	\$749.00
Matrox Millennium G400 Dual Head 32Mb	\$329.00
PowerColor Geforce II MX 32Mb TV Out	\$199.00
Apollo Geforce II MX 32Mb	\$169.00
Apollo TNT2 32Mb	\$105.00
32Mb Hercules 3D Prophet II MX	\$229.00
64Mb Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra + TV out + DVI out	\$959.00

### CPU, Motherboards and Memory

Seagate 20Gb IDE Ultra 66 Hard Drive	\$Call
128Mb SDRAM	\$Call
Intel Pentium 4 1.3Ghz with Motherboard and 128Mb RAMBUS	\$1290.00
Intel Pentium III 800Mhz with Gigabyte Motherboard	\$539.00
AMD Duron 800Mhz with Gigabyte Motherboard and Cooling Fan	\$330.00
AMD Athlon 1Ghz with Gigabyte Motherboard and Cooling Fan	\$569.00
AMD Athlon 1.2Ghz and 1.3Ghz also available	
ASUS A7B133 Motherboard (for Duron and Athlon)	\$329.00

### CD Writers and DVD's

Sony 8x Write 4x ReWrite 32x Read CD Writer	\$239.00
Yamaha CRW2100E 16x Write 10x ReWrite CD Writer	\$559.00
Mitsubishi 48x CD-ROM Drive	\$69.00
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM Drive	\$179.00
8x Hitachi DVD	\$139.00

### Sound Cards and Speakers

Audio Excel 4 Speaker out PCI with SPDIF out	\$29.00
Creative PCI 128 Sound Card	\$45.00
Cambridge Four Point Surround Speakers FPS1000	
With Subwoofer And Creative PCI Digital Card	\$189.00
Creative Sound Blaster Live! Value	\$99.00
Creative Sound Blaster Live! Digital Entertainment 5.1	\$Call
Creative Sound Blaster Live! Platinum 5.1	\$Call
Altec Lansing ACS-33 - 3piece	\$89.00
Game Theater XP Sound Card	\$299.00

### Computer Cases

Lian Li PC-60 Aluminium Case	\$389
Full Tower ATX Case for Pentium 4	\$169
ATX Tower Case	\$49

### Monitors

Mitsubishi 17" Monitor	\$389
Fujitsu 17" Monitor	\$389
Hitachi 17" Monitor	\$399
Sony 17" Trinitron Monitor	\$Call

### Joysticks

Thrustmaster F22 2000 Joystick	\$179
Firestorm Digital Gamepad USB	\$39

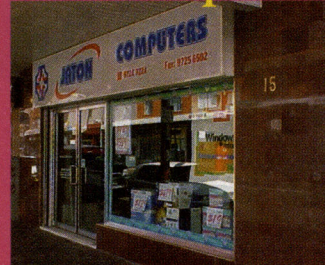
## Online and Mail Orders Welcome

15 Canley Vale Road  
Canley Vale NSW 2166  
Ph: (02) 9724 7224  
Fax: (02) 9725 6502

[sales@jatoncomputers.com.au](mailto:sales@jatoncomputers.com.au)

Prices are subject to change without notice and  
While stocks last.

**Visit our website  
for more specials**





# THE BEAST

THE ULTIMATE RIG

Now, word has it a lot of you are out there whinging for some kind of budget beast, a pitiful, sub-\$3000 machine that may look good in favourable light with a stiff tailwind but in reality has no chance to impress the opposite sex. This is the PCPP Beast, folks, the most powerful gaming rig sensible money can buy, built for speed, endurance and with a healthy dose of Feng-Shui. Don't dis the Beast people. Bad things happen to blasphemers.

## Pioneer 16xDVD ROM & H'ware Decoder

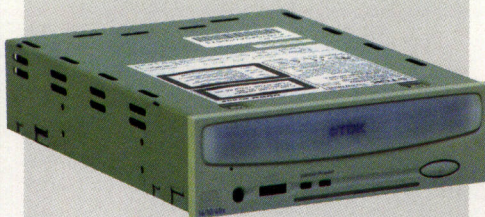
**DISTRIBUTOR** Pioneer  
**PRICE** \$549  
**URL** [www.pioneeraus.com.au](http://www.pioneeraus.com.au)

Pioneer's excellent drive will take care of all your DVD movie needs. Whether it's the calm introspection of Kriztoff Kieslowski's Three Colours: White or the non-stop gore-fest of Peter Jackson's Braindead, your viewing pleasure will remain uninterrupted by glitch, skip or irritating load-time. You also get a tasty Videologic hardware decoder for the smoothest possible shave... er... movie, and a bunch of Video Ezy vouchers.



## TDK VeloCD 16x Burner

**DISTRIBUTOR** TDK 1800 651 917  
**PRICE** \$599  
**URL** [www.tdk.com.au](http://www.tdk.com.au)

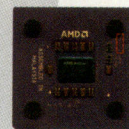


At last the mighty Yamaha has been toppled by this admittedly ugly duckling. With a brutish 16x burn rate, the TDK VeloCD makes duplicating a brace of Bros simplicity itself, and the inclusion of BURN Proof technology - a feature sorely lacking on the Yamaha - ensures not one of those valuable CDs will go to waste. Works best with Black CD 16x Media from CAPAX (02 9648 4977) which not only look the business, but are black. Black good.

## AMD Athlon 1.2 GHz

**DISTRIBUTOR** AMD Australia  
**PRICE** \$649  
**URL** [www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)

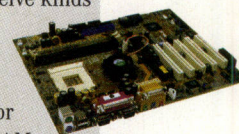
This blazing processor has the most advanced floating point unit in the world, 256k of integrated full speed L2 cache and a 200Mhz EV6 Front Side Bus. Which equals FAST. Never wait for Outlook to load again, ever. Do six things at once. Go mad, play Giants on the highest detail setting at 1600 x 1200. This thing is so powerful it's bad for you, guaranteed.



## ASUS A7M266

**DISTRIBUTOR** Achieva 02 9742 3288  
**PRICE** \$415  
**URL** [www.asus.com.tw](http://www.asus.com.tw)

The first Athlon motherboard supporting Double Data Rate DRAM, the A7M kicked twelve kinds of Bass Avenger out of our KT133 ATV board here at PCPP. As with all ASUS components, the A7M comes loaded with extras; an AGP Pro slot for professional graphics cards, 4 DDR RAM expansion slots for memory, ATA/100 support and a host of overclocking features.



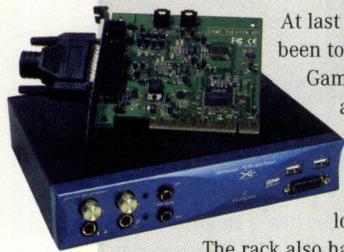


### Hercules Gametheater XP

**DISTRIBUTOR** Guillemot 02 8303 1818

**PRICE** \$329

**URL** [www.hercules.com](http://www.hercules.com)



At last the SB Live! has been toppled. The Gametheater sounds just as good, looks ten times better, and has a fat PCI cable to make the Beast look really serious.

The rack also has four USB ports, making it a great multi-purpose hub for joysticks, digital cameras, webcams, racing wheels... hell, anything you could possibly think of. Stylish and functional. What ever will they come up with next?

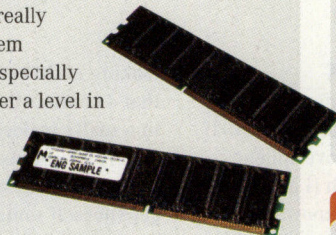
### 256Mb DDR DRAM

**DISTRIBUTOR** Kingmax 02 9648 4658

**PRICE** \$799

**URL** [www.kingmax.com](http://www.kingmax.com)

Once you go to 256Mb you'll never look back. You'll wonder how you ever survived with a miserable eighth of a gigabyte. This RAM is phenomenally expensive, but runs at a Double Data Rate, a blistering 266MHz. This really pumps up system performance, especially while you render a level in Q3Radiant and kick Thresh's buttocks in Quake3 at the same time.



### Microsoft Intellimouse Optical

**DISTRIBUTOR** Microsoft 132058

**PRICE** \$89

**URL** [www.microsoft.com.au](http://www.microsoft.com.au)

While the big silver Intellimouse Explorer certainly looks nice, we find the key word here is big. It's too big. But this little fellow is just right. An optical sensor means you'll never have to scrape that revolting black gunk off the inside ever again, and a USB connection means your lightning reflexes will now be fairly reflected in your next game of Tribes 2.



### Boston Acoustics Digital Theater 6000

**DISTRIBUTOR** Hi Fi & Video Marketing 02 9319 6877

**PRICE** \$1399

**URL** [www.bostonacoustics.com](http://www.bostonacoustics.com)

WARNING: ensure bowel is empty before using this speaker setup. The DT6000 is so powerful it contravenes several building ordinances, and violates no less than four separate paragraphs in the Geneva Convention. Five channel surround, funky remote and optical in make this THE choice for people who can't take the pain from its oughta-be-illegal bigger brother, the DT7000.



### Seagate Cheetah X15 18Gb

**DISTRIBUTOR** Agate Technology 02 9870 3600

**PRICE** \$1191

**URL** [www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)

It's not huge, but it's the fastest hard disk on the block, consistently pulverising the competition into small, vaguely circular lumps. The X15 runs at a stupidly fast 15,000rpm and has 4Mb of cache. It's only 18Gb, but two or even three of these would allow you to save every thirty seconds in Deus Ex. Amazing.



### Philips 201P 21 Inch Monitor

**DISTRIBUTOR** Philips Australia

**PRICE** \$2259

**URL** [www.philips.com.au](http://www.philips.com.au)

We mourn the FD Trinitron here in the PCPP Tech Bunker, for its reign has ended. In its place comes a new overlord, a 21" Monitor of such beauty, such crystal clearness, such elegant style, such a good price and such a short picture tube that it can fit into the most modest of student bedrooms. Love it tenderly, and it will treat you, as they say, grouse.



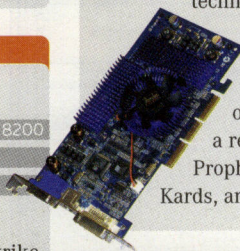
### Hercules 3D Prophet III

**DISTRIBUTOR** Guillemot 02 8303 1818

**PRICE** \$1199

**URL** [www.hercules.com](http://www.hercules.com)

The GeForce2 is dead. Long live the GeForce3. With its programmable pixel shader technology, 64Mb of really, really fast RAM, the fattest heat sinks in Christendom and the ability to bend an Ultra over its knee and spank it like a red-headed stepchild, the Prophet III is the new King of the Kards, and deservedly so.



### Logitech Cordless Freedom Navigator

**DISTRIBUTOR** Logitech 02 9972 3711

**PRICE** \$219

**URL** [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

Unchain your heart! Or at least unchain your keyboard. With all the kit the Beast includes, you'll end up with a huge ugly snarl of cables behind your desk. The Cordless Freedom Navigator eliminates at least one potential deathtrap (use your imagination) and the soft-as-silk keys make typing a 40,000 word thesis on Post-Structuralist Feminism an absolute breeze. First class honours every time! Also good for Quake3.



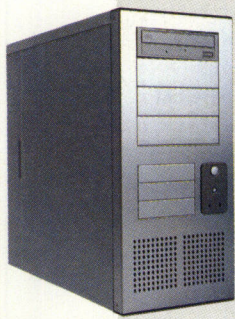
### LianLi PC-60

**DISTRIBUTOR** Aust. PC Accessories 03 9763 8200

**PRICE** \$400

**URL** [www.apca.net.au](http://www.apca.net.au)

A stunner. All aluminium and built to withstand a direct nuclear strike in the megaton range. As we have mentioned more than once, we even dropped this case down a flight of concrete steps and it barely flinched. Ten bays keep everything snug, three extra fans keep it cool, and slide-off covers and a motherboard tray mean it's ready for upgrade action any time.



TOTAL BEAST VALUE

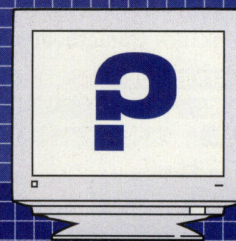
# \$99999



# SETUP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

DANIEL RUTTER WAXES TECHNICAL



## WRITE TO

### SETUP

PC PowerPlay  
PO BOX 634  
Strawberry Hills  
NSW 2016  
setup@pcpowerplay.com.au

When you write remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated \*.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC.

Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to all of your queries.

### Q> NETNETWORK

I recently bought four "Madge Smart 16/4 PCI Ringnode Mk2" network cards as an ex-government purchase for 5 bucks each (I asked for 10/100 cards, but I don't know... 16/4 doesn't look right), and when I install them, the best I can do is ping my own machine and that's it. I cannot connect to ANY other computer on the network.

I checked the cables and everything is fine, I've got on the net for the latest drivers, I even reinstalled the old network card I had and it all worked peachy keen first off.

Now these are rather odd looking network cards, and they contain a lot of new features in the network card properties. Should I even be using these cards or do I now have four rather unergonomic Frisbees?

Aaron

A> Foghorn Leghorn: "You, I say, you done bought yourself some Token Ring cards, boy. Those things ain't gonna work for Ethernet, no way, no how."

Pretty much all home and small business networking products around these days are Ethernet, either the old coaxial cable 10Base2 or the newer hub-based unshielded twisted pair cable 10BaseT or 100BaseT.

Token Ring's a quite different protocol which is still used in various businesses and educational institutions and, as you now know, government departments, but which is incompatible with Ethernet. Token Ring is about the same age as Ethernet, and was backed by IBM, but only has a small share of the market today.

The cable connectors for the cards you got are RJ45 sockets, just like the ones on 10/100BaseT Ethernet cards, so at a glance it'd be easy to get them mixed up.

You CAN connect your Token-Ring-equipped PCs to each other, but to do it you'll need RJ45-connected cables that look like Ethernet cables but are wired differently, and a Wiring Concentrator to plug them into, which looks like a 10/100BaseT hub but is just a passive thing that connects the cables together. A geek with a soldering iron could also probably make you a weird

looking multi-connected cable loop that'd connect the computers together in a really inelegant way.

Or, more sensibly, you could chalk that twenty bucks up to experience and get yourself some proper normal Ethernet cards instead.

The "16/4", by the way, is like the "10/100" designation for Ethernet cards; it indicates that the cards can handle both the old four and the slightly less old 16 megabit per second Token Ring modes.

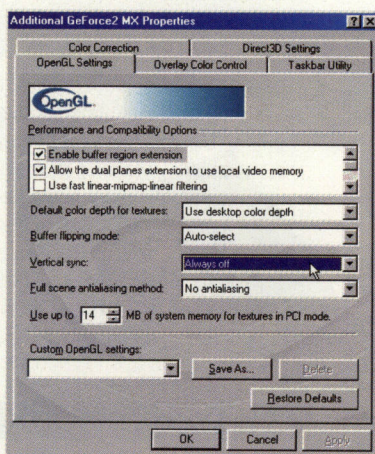
### Q> MUST GO FASTER...

I cant seem to get a higher frame rate in Q2, these are all the settings and results below. Can you tell me if there are any changes I can make?

[Snipped - long careful description of motherboard, video card, clock speeds, hard drive specifications, resolution, colour depth and refresh rate, operating system, filesystem state, levels of free Windows resources, background tasks running, RAM speed tweaks and virtual memory specs.]

Q2 demo1.dm2 gets 75 fps in 1024 by 768 32 bit colour at 75Hz refresh (VSync off). What's wrong?

-Rf-



A> Your VSync is locked on, Glasshoppah. Thus, the fastest frame rate you can ever get is the same as the refresh rate. Yeah, I know you turned it off in Q2, but it's on in the driver setup.

Go to Display Properties -> Settings -> Advanced -> GeForce2 MX ->

Additional Properties -> OpenGL Settings, and change the "Vertical sync" setting to "Always off".

You'd also be able to grab a few more FPS by dropping the desktop colour depth to 16 bit, because Q2 initialises OpenGL in the same depth as the desktop, and it doesn't look any better in 32 bit.

Don't, by the way, get the idea that I'm taking the piss out of our high-ASCII friend -Rf- for listing a zillion computer specs; the colour depth and refresh rate numbers told the story. OK, someone who gives me a 5000 word automated system config dump and then asks why his mouse ball's dirty, him I'm going to make fun of. But when you don't know what's wrong, detail can help.

### Q> RAM-A-RAMA

I currently have 64Mb of PC100 RAM, and I was thinking of expanding it by buying 128Mb of PC133 RAM. Does it matter that they are different speeds? Should I just remove my 64Mb and use the 128?

Also, I am running Win98 at the moment and I heard that it only supports up to 192Mb of RAM. Is this true?

Jeza Tang

A> It's fine to mix different speeds of memory. Some motherboards interact in odd ways with certain memory mixes, but it's not the way to bet. As long as you run the RAM no faster than the speed that the slowest module supports (100MHz, for a PC100/PC133 mix), everything should be fine.

Windows 98 can handle up to 2Gb of physical RAM. If you install more than 512Mb, you need to tweak a cache setting to work around a bug. But if you're installing more than 512Mb of RAM on a Win98 box, you probably need your head examined anyway.

### Q> SHOEHORNING SPEED

Can you please tell me if I can use a PIII 600MHz or faster CPU with my AOpen AX6BC Pro motherboard?

The manual for this board only specifies up to Pentium III 550MHz, and I am unable to find anyone selling a Pentium III 550MHz CPU anywhere any more. I wish to upgrade to a faster CPU



# LETTER OF THE MONTH

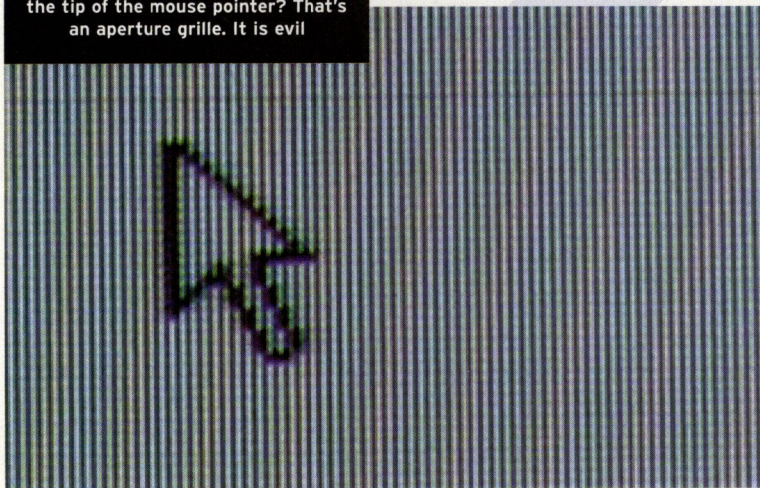
LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS...

AN INCREDIBLE SIDEWINDER GAMEVOICE ONLINE COMMUNICATION PERIPHERAL, COURTESY OF THE NICE PEOPLE AT MICROSOFT. HURRAH FOR THAT!

**Q> SO-NY! SO-NI! SO-NE!**  
I have some advice to all budding gamers out there who are looking for a new monitor or buying a new system. If you've got the choice between a 17" Sony Trinitron at \$800 and a 19" generic monitor at about \$900, TAKE THE SONY, not only will you be the envy of all at the HUGE LANs, they absolutely rock. The only minor blemish they otherwise have is in stores when they sit them next to other monitors, they look like they bend inwards. IGNORE IT, that's the flat screen, one you have sat in front of it for 5 mins it's perfect.

Tin Reaper

See that dark line about 5cm above the tip of the mouse pointer? That's an aperture grille. It is evil



**A>** Yup, those Trinitrons - and the Mitsubishi Diamondtrons that use the same technology - are pretty nice. Until you notice the lines. The ghostly grey lines. Always there. Laughing at you. Oh, how they laugh. You see, these are what's known as "aperture grille" monitors, which use scads of fine wires strung vertically to cast the shadows on the



screen that stop the electron beams from lighting up the wrong phosphors. The wires need to be held steady by horizontal "damper wires". All aperture grille picture tubes have at least one damper wire - bigger tubes have two.

And so you get the shadows, as shown here, above the Windows pointer that's there for scale.

The shadows are there on Trinitron TVs as well, but you sit far enough away from a TV that you're not likely to notice them. Many people don't notice them on their monitor, either, until they're pointed out to them by someone like me.

And then, they're always there. Always. Grey. Imperfect. Horrid horrid grey imperfect stains! That you have to get rid of! Now! Right NOW! With the axe! YES! YES, THE AXE!!

The board is currently running a 400MHz Celeron on a PPGA slotket adapter. Should I try overclocking my Celeron? Which way would be the better option? I Would like to play B-17 2 with all the detail.

Tony Reitner

**A>** You can use faster P-IIIs on the AX6BC Pro, but you'll probably need to update your BIOS so that the faster CPU will be recognised (depending on what BIOS version you have at the moment). See [www.aopen.com.tw/tech/download/mbbios/ax6bcp/ro2.htm](http://www.aopen.com.tw/tech/download/mbbios/ax6bcp/ro2.htm) for files and instructions.

This is a common problem, but it's fortunately also a common solution.

CPU architecture discontinuities like Intel's switch from the earlier P-III designs

to the newer Coppermine ones can make some motherboards incapable of keeping up, even with a BIOS update. But the changes needed are generally small - in the case of the Coppermine chips, all you need are a slotket adapter to let you plug the newer Socket 370 CPUs into the older Slot A motherboards, and a motherboard voltage regulator that can deliver the lower core voltage the newer CPUs want. So a lot of older boards are still OK.

Many motherboards work with processors faster than they're meant to support, but report silly numbers for the processor speed on startup. If that's the only problem your motherboard has, there's no need to bother looking for a BIOS update, as the silly numbers do no harm and your CPU is working fine.

**Q> DUSTBUSTING**  
How much of an effect can dust have on your CPU and what is the best way to get it out once it's in there?

Kaivaal

**A>** The best way to get dust out of a CPU is with a tack hammer. Clamp the CPU firmly in a bench vise, then...

Oh, all right. I presume you're using the term "CPU" in the same way as those helpful Learn About Computers books that used to be foisted on people, which always called the main computer case the "CPU", just before they taught you to tell the difference between input and output.

Dust in your computer case is not a very big deal, generally speaking.



## TECH TIP

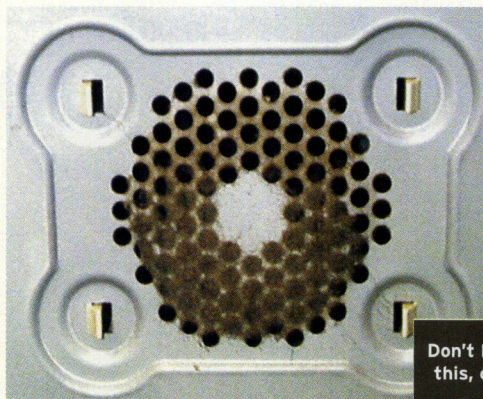
## CORRECT COOLING

I talked to a fellow today who wanted an active Peltier-element CPU cooler. It turned out that he wanted it not so he could be a study overclocker with a CPU hidden by a huge blob of silicon sealant, but because he had a flaky computer that was running a security camera video switcher or other.

Peltier coolers pump more heat into the air inside the computer than normal passive ones, so putting one on the CPU would make the problem worse, if overheating of something other than the CPU was in fact the problem.

If you think your computer has some kind of overheating problem, here's the first thing to do - take the case off the computer, grab a normal desk fan, point it into the works running full blast, and go about your business. If your problem goes away, then you're right about heat being the problem, and you need better case ventilation and, perhaps, better heatsink-and-fan coolers on whatever chips are getting too hot. If putting the whole computer in a roaring gale doesn't help, though, then heat ain't your problem.

Which is good, because there are a lot of computers out there in which one could start a small potato farm. The dust is sucked in by the main case fan or fans, and not all of it makes it out again. It accumulates on cards, on chips, on cables. This is only usually a problem if there's enough dust on things like...



Don't let your fan intake grille get like this, clean the dust from it regularly

...fan intake grilles, that airflow through the case is impeded. In which case the inside temperature rises, and components can overheat. The same thing can happen if dust cakes up in an insulative blanket on things that need airflow over them to keep cool, like the (real) CPU or the hot chip on your graphics card.

Since dust itself is seldom conductive, it doesn't matter if it covers circuit board traces and the like, unless it makes things too hot in the process.

You can also run into problems if there's dust all over a connector and you plug something into it, squishing dust into the terminals and possibly getting a lousy connection.

You can get dust out of your computer with a household vacuum cleaner, but you've got to be careful. Normal vacuum cleaners are too powerful for this job - if they don't have a "curtains" setting, you can damage things with them. And they also accumulate static electricity, which can zap sensitive chips. Old-style belt-drive vacuum cleaners can generate massive static charges, but any cleaner with a plastic tube can build up more than enough volts to do harm. They're OK for external use, sucking dust off grilles, but you don't want to use them inside the case.

The little baby vacuum cleaners sold specifically for cleaning computers are a waste of money, if you ask me, but you can also get adapter kits for full-sized cleaners, which reduce the suction and give you a smaller tube with various attachments. The lower air flow reduces static, and if you hold the tube close to the tip, keep the computer plugged into the wall and touch the

case metalwork now and then, you're not too likely to kill anything. Jaycar Electronics have these adapter kits.

You can also use "air duster", compressed difluoroethane gas in a can, available from electronics stores. Used carefully, it can de-dust all sorts of things, but you do have to take care not to blow dust off one component and into something else.

## Q DRIVE INFESTATION

I am currently using a Gigabyte GA-BX2000+ mainboard in my system and it has a Promise ATA66 controller alongside the EIDE controller built into the 440BX chipset. The board also has

four IDE ports (two black - EIDE and two blue - ATA66). Seeing as how the Promise controller is separate to the chipset, am I able to run eight IDE devices, for instance four ATA66 HDD's off the Promise controller and say a CD-ROM, CD-RW, DVD-ROM and a Zip drive off the chipset EIDE controller?

Michael Martin

A Yes, and no. There are quite a few motherboards with dual IDE controllers, and four sockets, and you can indeed plug up to eight drives into them. Yours is one of the earlier attempts, with support for speeds up to Ultra DMA/33 on the motherboard-chipset controller, and up to Ultra DMA/66 on the other one. Some current boards work with UDMA/66 and UDMA/100, respectively, in the same way.

The problem isn't plugging in the drives, but getting the boot order right. I don't know whether the GA-BX2000+ lets you elegantly boot from a hard drive on the second controller without disabling the first one completely - even that isn't enough, with some other four-connector boards.

This isn't a big problem, though; you just put your boot device on the primary channel connector for the first controller, and then everything else wherever you like. Sure, that means your boot drive will only run at UDMA/33 speed, when UDMA/66 support is standard these days and UDMA/100 support very common. But that doesn't have a big impact on the actual drive performance, as desktop computers seldom do anything disk-intensive enough, or have drives fast enough, to saturate the slower UDMA mode.

## Q IRQSOME PROBLEM...

I, and I think also most of the others in the gaming community, have one big problem on our hands, IRQs. To my knowledge there are 15 in a computer. That's my first question, why only 15, secondly, if there are only 15 and there is an increasing amount of hardware to put into the Beast you own, won't we run out of IRQs, or have I missed something?

Niels Makel

A Yup, there are only 15 IRQs (Interrupt Requests) in a modern IBM compatible computer. There were only eight in PCs before the original AT. Essentially, there were and are so few as each IRQs needs physical hardware to support them, and that costs money.

IRQs are how a device signals the CPU when the device needs the processor's attention. You can't even use all of the 15, because several are used by standard system hardware. And if a device needs an IRQ to itself and can't find one then it won't work. And people are putting more and more extra hardware in their PCs these days. And so the problem's getting smaller and smaller all the time, and most people don't even need to know IRQs exist any more.

Oh, sorry. Did I leave a step out of that explanation? You see, these days expansion cards have the ability to share IRQs. Multiple things can sit on one address and all work.

When IRQ sharing was an exciting new concept, it was generally bad news. Things reported that they could share IRQs when they actually couldn't, or at least not properly, and motherboards and OSes didn't support it properly. So seeing your video card and network adapter and SCSI controller all sitting on the one IRQ guaranteed you a computer flakier than a very flaky thing with severe psoriasis on a windy day at the beach.

That doesn't happen so much any more, which is why Windows 2000 can get away with its standard behaviour on computers with the Advanced Configuration and Power Interface (ACPI) enabled. Win2000, on an ACPI machine, piles up as many devices as it can on as few system resources as possible, in order to leave the maximum possible resources free for extra hardware that isn't able to share. You can't manually change the resource allocations in any way, without disabling ACPI and doing a reinstall.

If an OS had tried that sort of thing in 1997, it would have turned pretty much any computer you installed it on into a giant quivering faeces meringue pie. These days, it pretty much works.



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# CD POWERPLAY #61



## HAIL, GOOD FELLOW!

We've all gone RPG mad this month at PC PowerPlay. I've tried to resist it while the other guys have come into the office dressed in studded leather armour and those pointy wizard hats with the stars on them, but... I... couldn't... help myself. Yes, I'll admit it, I'm wearing a codpiece. And I like it! I've also managed to squeeze the enormous Baldur's Gate 2 demo onto the coverdisc, so you too can live out your favourite medieval fantasies. Fetch me a tankard of your finest mead, wench!

[cdtech@pcpowerplay.com.au](mailto:cdtech@pcpowerplay.com.au)

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## DEMOS CD1

### Operation Flashpoint

W, S - forward / backward  
A, D - strafe left / right  
Z - go prone / stand up  
V - reload weapon  
SPACE - change weapon  
RETURN - action menu  
[] - choose action  
LMB - fire  
RMB - zoom



### Operation Flashpoint



In this demo there is one level available, in which you play as a part of an infantry squad. Your squad's mission is to neutralize the hostile forces in a small area of one of the islands in the game.

### GIANTS CITIZEN KABUTO

**Publisher** Interplay

**Requirements** P2-350, 64MB, Win95/98/ME, 3D accelerator card

Yet another Giants demo. This one lets you play the role of the Sea Reaper. In case you just started buying this mag, Giants is a revolutionary new style of action game combining RTS elements like base building and resource management in a simple and easy to understand way that has never been seen before. The game requires

strategic thinking to exploit the enemies' weaknesses and manipulate your opponents against one another for control. The frenzied action ensues once your enemies' weaknesses are determined. For example, Kabuto depends on the Vimps for a food source to keep up his strength. The Sea Reaper can call in a tornado to sweep the Vimps away, leaving Kabuto hungry, weak and open for attack. Hopefully, next month, we'll have the kabuto demo to complete the trilogy.

### OPERATION FLASHPOINT

**Publisher** Codemasters

**Requirements** P2-350, 64MB, Win95/98/ME, 3D accelerator card

Operation Flashpoint brings the player the most complex war game experience ever, it offers unprecedented freedom of action integrating command of larger squads and use of any available vehicles with total immersion. Experience the best cold war military equipment ñ infantry, mobile, armored and aircraft.

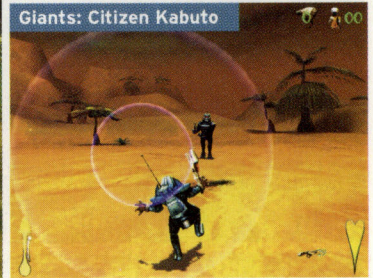
### STAR TREK AWAY TEAM

**Publisher** Activision

**Requirements** P2-266, 64MB, Win95/98/ME

Star Trek Away Team is the first squad based strategy game based in the Star Trek Next Generation universe. In Away Team, you'll have the opportunity to form your own strike teams from seventeen different characters, all with their own special skills and weapons. With an epic storyline that spans the Star Trek galaxy, you'll take your team on away missions to dangerous locations and inhospitable planets, like the Romulan home world, the Klingon home world, and Borg Cubes!





## HOSTILE WATERS

**Publisher** Interplay  
**Requirements** P233, 32MB, Win95/98/ME, 3D accelerator

The year is 2032, the world is at peace for the first time - until the bombings started. Now the people of this new age must relearn war to secure a future of peace. Hostile Waters: Antaeus Rising combines powerful real-time strategy with action elements in which players take command of a super-powerful aircraft carrier/manufacturing platform. Players create military units with their carrier and command their army against the forces of the Old World Cabal. Players make decisions from

within the carrier in the manner of a traditional real-time strategy game, then, enter their units for some third-person mayhem!

## GORE MULTIPLAYER TEST

**Publisher** 4D Rulers  
**Requirements** P266, 64MB, Win95/98/ME, 3D accelerator card

Gore - The Ultimate Soldier will be an online multi-player game with an Offline ladder system placing the player against Gores advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) system so you can play by yourself if you do not have an Internet connection, or want to practice offline. The Gore Production Team which is based on hard core gamers, not

accountants, has striven to create a balance of realism, interactivity, technology and most importantly fun.

## THE MOON PROJECT

**Publisher** Topware  
**Requirements** P266, 32MB, Win95/98/ME, 3D accelerator

The Moon Project is the sequel to the highly successful Earth 2150. The Moon Project features an enhanced version of 2150's groundbreaking 3D engine and provides greater zoom levels for even more strategic play. The Moon Project also adds brand new units, weapons, and technologies such as: submarines, earthquake generators and artillery.

## KOHAN IMMORTAL SOVEREIGNS

**Publisher** Timegate Studios  
**Requirements** P266, 64MB, Win95/98/ME

Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns is a real-time strategy game set in the fantasy world, Khalhun, in which you are one of an immortal race known as the Kohan. A series of massive cataclysms lead to your race's demise and it is up to you to restore their reign. You are reawakened to a new world very much unlike the one you once knew and you must solve the mystery of your race's destruction in order to return the Kohan to their rightful glory.

## GAMEPLAY CD1

### SEVERANCE BLADE OF DARKNESS EDITOR TOOLS

This is a great collection of utilities to create your own Blade of Darkness levels. You need the full game to make use of this tool.

### JUDGE DREDD HALFLIFE MOD

As a Judge, the new police force authorized to act as Judge, Jury, and

Executioner, it is your duty to keep the cities safe against the common street Perps.

### GORE PATCH

We are not exactly sure what this patch does but it's for the demo. If you have any problems getting the demo to work, try this file.

### ALONE IN THE DARK 2 GAME PATCH

If you have any problems with the full game try this patch. If the game works, you don't really need this patch.

### WINDOWS DETONATOR 3 VIDEO DRIVERS

Grab NVIDIA's latest drivers to increase it's power by up to 50% on

the GeForce, GeForce2, Quadro, and Quadro2 family of graphic accelerators.

### DIRECT X8.0A

The latest Microsoft DirectX 8.0 drivers for Windows 9x/SE/ME. This latest version of DirectX offers updated graphics, faster frame rates, and support for massively multiplayer games.





## DEMO CD1 CONTROLS



### GIANTS CITIZEN KABUTO

Run Forward W  
Run Backward S  
Run Left A  
Run Right D  
Use Weapon/Attack Left mouse  
Zoom Mode E  
Zoom In Z  
Map Mode C  
Select Spell Left Shift  
Select Spell Backward End  
Select Spell Forward Delete  
Turbo Right mouse  
Cast Spell Space bar  
Cycle Weapon Forward Q  
Cycle Weapon Backward Tab  
Jump Left Alt  
Select Spell 1-5  
Give Health H

Throw Mine B  
Use Flare V  
Activate Party House Item X  
Drop Smartie Backspace  
Drop Current Weapon J

### KOHAN CONTROLS

Most controls are via the mouse.

### HOSTILE WATERS

Fire - Mouse 1  
Target Default - Mouse 2  
Tager Reticule - TAB  
Weapons Toggle - Z  
Cancel Target - G  
Turret Lock - Mouse 3

### THE MOON PROJECT

Controls via the mouse.

### OPERATION FLASHPOINT

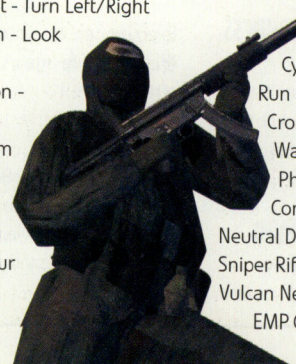
[W] - Forward  
[E] or [SHIFT]+[W] - Sprint  
[A] - Strafe Left  
[D] - Strafe Right  
[S] - Backwards  
[SHIFT] + Direction Key - Move Fast  
[Q] or [Z] - Lie Down/Stand Up  
[R] - Reload Weapon  
[RETURN] - Open Action Menu  
[O]-[9] - Call Command Menu and select menu items  
[Backspace] - Call Command Menu and go back a level in command structure  
[Numpad.] - Command View On/Off  
[V] or [Numpad 0] - Weapon View On/Off  
[+]/[-] - Zoom In/Out (1st, 3rd Person only)  
[M] - Map  
Mouse Left/Right - Turn Left/Right  
Mouse Up/Down - Look Up/Down  
Left Mouse Button - Fire Gun/Throw Weapon/Use Item in hand  
Mouse Wheel - Call Action Menu and highlight your menu items  
Middle Mouse

Button/Click Mouse Wheel - Select Action Menu Item  
Right Mouse Button - Zoom In

### STAR TREK AWAY TEAM

#### Controls

Pause- Enter  
Select Entire Team - A  
Cancel Orders - Backspace  
Cycle Movement - X  
Toggle Vision Cones - V  
Toggle Sound Cones - S  
Cycle Vision Cones - TAB  
Display Objectives - O  
Toggle Minimap - M  
Zoom In - Num +  
Zoom Out - Num -  
Zoom Reset - Num \*  
Move - Mouse 1  
Action - Mouse 2  
Cycle Inventory - Mouse 3  
Run - A  
Crouch - C  
Walk - W  
Phaser - P  
Concussion Grenade - G  
Neutral Disruptor - N  
Sniper Rifle - F  
Vulcan Nerve Pinch - K  
EMP Grenade - E





## DEMO CD2

### ALONE IN THE DARK II

The sequel to the Lovecraft inspired original takes a very different approach. AITD II has our hero exploring a piratically haunted house this time on a cliff above the sea. There's a distinct 1920s theme this time around, with Tommy guns and zombie henchmen. A kidnapped child must be saved from devilish clutches of an imposing vamp. The controls are very similar to the original and the old school high-action adventuring continues unabated in Alone in the Dark II.

#### Controls

To use control actions, press enter to access menu, select action or inventory item, press enter again, then selection how to use selection. In game, hold down space to ready your selection, then use arrow keys for various kinds of action.

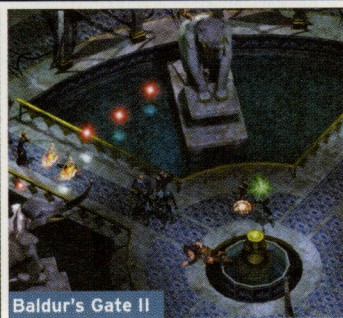
Forward - Up Arrow  
Back - down Arrow



Alone in the Dark II



Baldur's Gate II



Baldur's Gate II



Baldur's Gate II

Turn left - Left Arrow  
Turn right - Right Arrow  
Double tap Forward - Run  
Space - Action/ Unpause  
Enter - Access Inventory and Menu/  
Make selections in menus  
I - Inventory  
S - Sound On/Off  
M - Music On/Off  
P - Pause

#### The Garden

After having blown open the gate to the mansion, you find a garden sprawling between you and the house. There is a zombie on the ground in front of you. He'll stand up and use his Tommy gun, so punch and kick him until he expires. Pick up the Tommy gun, the ammo and

the flask. Go forward and take down the two zombies advancing on you. With your Tommy gun and revolver, you'll have enough ammo to take out the two big guys with shotguns too. Now go over to the statue and push it out of the way to enter the gardens...

### BALDUR'S GATE 2 SHADOWS OF AMN

Feel like an adventure? The RPG experience of last year is our offering to the uninitiated role players whose tastes have been whetted by our feature. This is the modern masterpiece by which all others are measured. Our demo of Baldur's Gate features the first level of the game, where you lead a band of adventurers out of bondage and begin

the search for your captor. Baldur's Gate 2 offers all the excitement of adventuring D&D style - see p 44 if you don't believe D&D can be exciting. BG2 allows the creation of a completely unique character: a Paladin, a fighter, a thief, a mage or many more, with feats and skills that improve over time.

You start in a dank prison, with your comrades imprisoned around you. Your old companion Imoen has freed you and wants out quick. A smart option but not any easy one! Some old friends must be freed but once that is done, make your escape...

#### Controls

The mouse is used to select and move your characters. Drag select your party

or select them individually from the menu down the right side of the screen. Leave the mouse over a menu option for a description.

Inventory = I  
Character Record = R  
Return to Game = G  
Journal = J  
Map = M  
Wizard Spells = W  
Priest Spells = P  
Options = O  
Hide Interface = H  
Right Interface = U  
Left Interface = Y  
Chat Window = T  
Location = X  
Quick Save = Q  
Toggle AI = A



# POOL OF RADIANCE SSI 1988



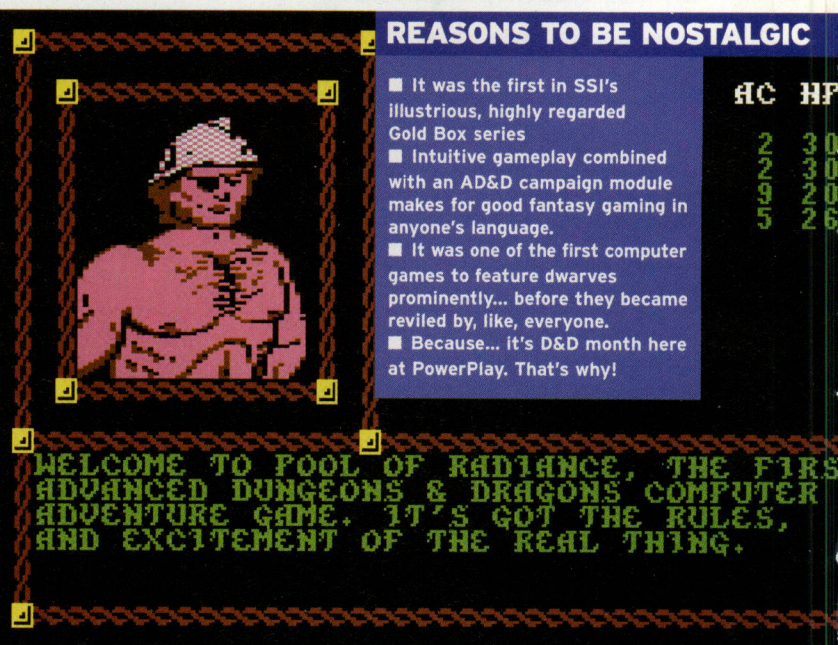
Beginning as an exceptionally geeky hobby in Wisconsin garages back in the later stages of the last century, *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) has grown to be a perennially popular cultural pastime amongst misfit and savvy socialite alike. The brand has expanded over the past two decades to include books, boardgames, cards, an unfortunate movie and, of course, videogames. Videogames that, for all their flaws, exerted an almost immeasurable amount of influence over the gaming industry in its infancy and continue to still dominate the way traditional western RPGs are developed for the consumer electronics market.

The original *Pool of Radiance*, the sequel of which is soon to be released by Ubisoft, is a fine example of just such a genre defining title. Developed by SSI,



*Pool of Radiance* was the first in the developer's line of Gold Box AD&D titles, which was to include some of the greatest AD&D titles to date, including *Curse of the Azure Bonds*, *Dragons of The Flame* and *Secret of The Silver Blades*. Why all those titles have the words 'of the' in them is a matter of debate, but the general consensus around the office is that it was a legal requirement of all AD&D affiliated products back in the 80s.

But *Pool of Radiance* - well, not only did that not have 'of the' in it (although, 'Pool of the Radiance - Happy Bang Dragon Sock!' was probably how it was titled in Japan), but also, it was what many consider to



## REASONS TO BE NOSTALGIC

- It was the first in SSI's illustrious, highly regarded Gold Box series
- Intuitive gameplay combined with an AD&D campaign module makes for good fantasy gaming in anyone's language.
- It was one of the first computer games to feature dwarves prominently... before they became reviled by, like, everyone.
- Because... it's D&D month here at PowerPlay. That's why!

be the defining early AD&D title (As distinct from the other defining early AD&D titles - *Ed*). Based on the *Forgotten Realms/Ruins of Adventure* AD&D campaign module, *Radiance* gained an almost notorious popularity amongst pen and paper gamers everywhere with its deceptively complex play mechanics and simple appearance. The story, though reasonably decent, was based around the straightforward concept of gathering a party, killing monsters and gaining stats. It is for this reason, along with the fact that there were only four character classes available for play, that *Radiance* was criticised by a

small set of AD&Ders for being too simplistic. To this criticism we have a very simple, direct reply. Bollocks.

*Radiance* was a great game. Admittedly it lacked the sheer depth of today's monster quest AD&D titles, but its simplistic, compelling and utterly enjoyable gameplay served to introduce a new audience to dungeoneering, thus concreting AD&D's status as the culturally viable entertainment phenomenon that we know today. If you can, play it. If you can't, then wait for the new one. Either way, do not miss out on *Pool of Radiance*, because it'll be your loss if you do.

Daniel Staines



## REVIEWS

Tomb Raider (94%)  
The Neverhood (93%)  
Syndicate Wars (91%)

## THE ARCHIVE

FIVE YEARS AS AUSTRALIA'S AUTHORITY ON PC GAMING

### PCPP#9 JANUARY 1997

What the hell *is* it about the Command & Conquer franchise and PCPP? It seems that almost every time we come into contact with the gaming colossus, inexplicable things start happening. Giving 94% to Tiberian Sun is, quite obviously, the most prominent example of this strange behaviour, but the Westwoodian weirdness had begun long before that - way back in our January 1997 issue, in fact. "Red Alert: Game of The Year?" This question alone is probably the most blinked at query in the history of computer games journalism and caused dozens of regular PCPP readers to dust off the previous issue of their favourite mag, grab the new one, hold them both up to the light and shake their heads in baffled puzzlement. Not because it was not a valid question, but rather because it, and the big picture of a half rendered Allied V2 belonged on the previous issue of PCPP... you know, the one with the actual Red Alert review in it? Why we chose to stick RA on the cover a month after it was reviewed remains a mystery, though possibly we were too distracted by the hypnotic power of the triangular, traffic-cone breasts of gaming's first female superstar, Lara Croft. It's interesting to note that her first outing garnered a very respectable 94%. Of course, she'd be lucky to get a 70% nowadays, but there was a time when we enjoyed performing anatomically impossible feats with an anatomically impossible woman.

"I want to thank all of you for making my work here a fun-filled adventure"  
it's then Head Honcho, Jay Wilbur, on leaving id and sounding like a Kinder Surprise advertisement!



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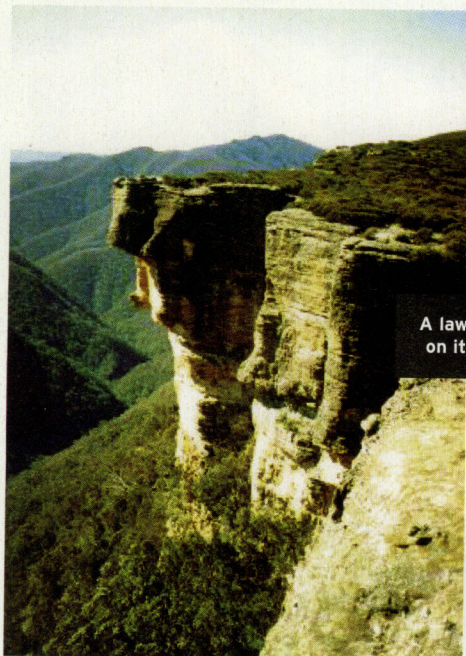
VOLUME SEVEN OUT NOW!





YELLOW BOOTS

# PAJERO MEETS GRAVITY



A lawsuit is  
on its way



**B**ecause just the other day my crazy ex-third flatmate insisted that he again wanted to go base-jumping, I was reminded of a pair of young developers I met several months ago, who had emailed the boots with news of their new game titled, very simply, *The Rush*. *The Rush* is a base-jumping simulator in which the player will "experience the full Rush of terminal velocity in a six hundred metre free-fall without safety net, backup chute, or brakes. Yee Hah!" And yes, it actually said Yee Hah on the press release.

So I met with these young developers - who, because of continuing legal proceedings against my crazy ex-third flatmate must remain nameless - at the top of 566 metre cliff called Kanangra Walls. These spectacular sandstone cliffs lie some 80km out the back of Oberon, which in turn is some 80km out the back of Bathurst, which in turn is four hours from Sydney. We were out at the Walls because the young

developers planned to use full motion video of an actual real life base-jump in the game.

For the uninitiated, base-jumping involves hurling yourself off a very high cliff with a parachute strapped to your back and no room for second thoughts. In your brief and noisy decent you are supposed to open the chute high enough above the ground to give the canopy adequate time work against your breaking every bone in your body on impact.

Well. These boys had a 35mm film camera strapped to a helmet, so the guy was a little top-heavy to start with, plus there was a lot of cabling lying around attached to a sort of speedometer thing so they could synchronise the aperture or something, plus it was a really windy day, plus I don't think either of them had in fact base-jumped or even parachuted before, plus my crazy ex-third flatmate was fooling around with the Pajero which they'd parked on the edge of the cliff, plus they'd parked it

## CORRECTION



A couple of months ago the boots took a look at *Dungeons & Dragons: The Movie*, a look that was both cutting and insightful. Sometime later I - on behalf of the boots - received an email via the now infamous [letters@pcpowerplay.com.au](mailto:letters@pcpowerplay.com.au) from a gent by the name of Nick Jardine. Nick was very upset with the boots, because the boots reported that the guy who plays the bad guy in *D&D:TM* (not the Jeremy Irons guy, the other guy) was the guy who played the mummy in *The Mummy*, except that he wasn't. Confused? Then these two pictures should clear it all up. The guy with the yellow hair is the guy who played the bad guy in *D&D:TM* and the guy with the yellow shirt is the guy who played the mummy in *The Mummy*. They are not the same guy. Mr Jardine, the boots stand corrected.

in neutral, plus the handbrake had apparently always been a bit dicky, although, props to my crazy ex-third flatmate, he managed to roll free of the vehicle before it, all the recording gear, the camera strapped to the helmet, our lunch and one of the developers' pants went over the edge in a huge tangle of Pajero, cables, half-folded parachute and a small silky terrier who'd come along for the ride.

One interesting piece of data that came out of the tragedy is that although it only takes a Pajero some five seconds to fall 566 metres, these vehicles will not necessarily explode on impact, but instead make a dull sort of metallic crunching sound as they smash through a stand of eucalyptus. The two young developers stood ashen-faced on the edge of the cliff and the space between them was exactly the width of a Pajero plus a small silky terrier which belonged to one of their mothers, apparently. A red welt was rising on the naked thigh of one of the developers from where his pants had been ripped right off by the passing wing mirror of the Pajero. My crazy ex-third flatmate apologised meekly, and was then chased into the bush by the two young developers while I sat at the top of the cliff and mourned my lunch.

Expect to see *The Rush* on shelves in late 2001.

## NEXT MONTH...

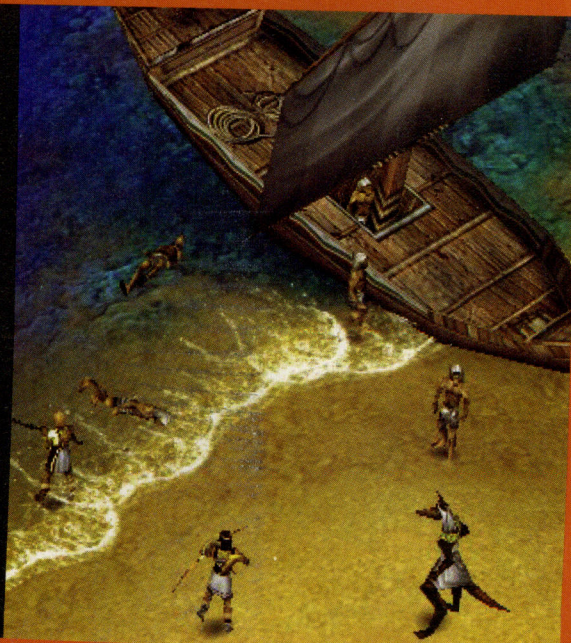
### AGE OF EMPIRES III

The return of the greatest realtime strategy game ever. And this time it's in full 3D...

### REVIEWED!

Commandos 2, *Myst III: Exile*, *Diablo 2: Lord of Destruction*, *Operation Flashpoint*, and some others that were too crap to put in this month...

PC POWERPLAY #62 - ON SALE JUNE 6, 2001







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Did you know that the ASUS name originated from the word Pegasus?

Pegasus was created from Medusa's blood when her head was cut off by Perseus. Pegasus, originated in Greek mythology, is a white horse with wings without the horn of a unicorn. Pegasus was tamed by Bellerophon and they destroyed the Chimera, a creature which was part lion, part goat and part snake.

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Look out for ASUS's new V8200 64Mb series completely exhibiting the power of NVIDIA's GeForce™ 3 GPU and superior 460MHz Double Data Rate frame buffer. This card undisputedly stands at the forefront of graphics technologies and brings users unbelievable 3D visual experiences like never before!

Top this off with the ASUS A7A266 using both PC133 and DDR SDRAM so you have the present and the future! The A7A266 features the competition-blowing DDR SDRAM capability (2 slots up to 2Gb) and also supports with PC133 SDRAM support (3 slots up to 3Gb). The A7A266 comes with AGP Pro slot and ATA 100 Dual Channel interface.

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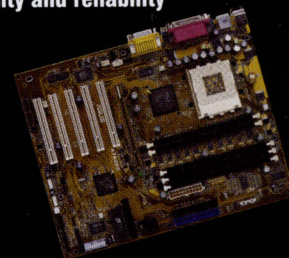


## ASUS AGP-V8200 GeForce™ 3

jaw-dropping realism.

Most Sophisticated Visual Realism, ASUS V8200 series is powered by the most advanced graphics processing unit on earth – the fully programmable nFiniteFX™ engine.

- 64Mb DDR memory
- Integrates a complete instruction set
- Enables dynamic reconfiguration,
- Fully exposed registers for vertex and pixel shading,
- Custom lighting, transform and effects programs.
- Creating an infinite number of pixel-level special effects
- 76 GigaFLOPS, 800 billion operations per second,
- 7.4GB/sec effective memory bandwidth.
- 3.2 billion samples per second FSAA fill rate,
- ASUS quality and reliability



## ASUS A7A266 – DDR and PC133 SDRAM Compatible!

The ASUS A7A266 supports both PC133 SDRAM and the high performance DDR SDRAM. No motherboard offers so much flexibility.

### Key Specification Summary

- Socket A AMD Athlon/Duron processors to 1.2+GHz
- Chipset: ALI M1647 North Bridge and ALI M1535D+ South Bridge
- 266 MHz Front Side Bus
- 2 unbuffered DIMMs with up to 2GB of PC1600/PC2100 DDR SDRAM support
- 3 unbuffered DIMMs with up to 3GB of PC133 SDRAM support
- C-Media CMI-8738 PCI 6-channel audio chip (optional)
- AGP Pro slot with AGP 4X/2X/1X support
- 5 PCI slots, 6 USB ports, 2 Serial and 1 Parallel ports
- Dual channel Bus Master IDE ports supports ATA-33/66/100
- ATX Form Factor
- Wakeup on LAN, Wakeup on Ring, chassis intrusion
- PC Health Monitoring™





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